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## The art of self-assertion

### John Bayley

EVELYN WAUGH  
*Waugh in Abyssinia*  
253pp. Methuen. £9.95.  
043348309  
MARTIN STANNARD (Editor)  
Evelyn Waugh: *The critical heritage*  
337pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £18.95.  
071009548

The English have both gained and lost from liking their novels to be written by "characters". Certainly our most celebrated novelists, and the ones most appreciated by foreigners too, have written novels which directly reflect their remarkable selves. That remarkableness need not take the form of high intelligence, although his own kind of intelligence is a necessary accompaniment of any real character. But not predominant intellect, of the kind that writes *The Man without Qualities*, *Auto-da-Fé*, *The Magic Mountain*. The nearest the English novel comes to that is with Conrad or George Eliot, novelists often preferred by academic critics to our more traditional sort.

However much academic criticism may rationalize them, novels written by true characters are usually adored or disliked on deep instinctive grounds. The reader feels a complex rapport with the writer or he does not, and criticism can ultimately make very little of this relationship. It may be love-hate, or something odder than that, but its involvement depends upon the writer not "being" a character self-consciously, but achieving the essence of one in terms of the organization and inspiration of st. Dickens may have called himself "the Inimitable", but he had no idea what a much more extraordinary personality his novels in fact contained, made visible in the light of a reader's response.

The personality actually proffered by a novelist, the intelligent friendship, as it were, extended to an Aldous Huxley or a Margaret Drabble, is quite another thing. Its necessary vulnerability is open to malice, as in other kinds of friendship, and to the patronage of modified interest or approval. The relation, however mutually gratifying, remains a cool one. But whoever felt judicious malice or approving coolness towards the work of Elizabeth Bowen, say, or that of Barbara Pym, or Evelyn Waugh? An absurdly heterogeneous trio! Not really, because for all of them, as in a love relation, you either fall or you don't. And

the love-provoking element is also the presence of character, which only the art, not its owner, can fully display.

Novelists of character do of course try themselves out in their art in various roles. Dickens did it in a perpetual drama of self-discovery, whose object was not so much self-knowledge as the idea of discovery for its own sake - a dramatic process. Evelyn Waugh, as one might expect, was extremely consistent in his roles, which modified locally as he grew older. The first volume of his unfinished memoirs, *A Little Learning*, contains at least two indications that he had considered his own nature specifically in relation to his heredity. His grandfather once killed a wasp which had alighted on his wife's forehead by pressing it down and into the flesh. His father, Arthur Waugh, so a friend who came to stay remarked to the author, was delightful, but played a part the whole time. Like all big "characters" Evelyn Waugh played himself instinctively, but with an increasing richness and fanaticism.

Snobbery, as has often been said, is based on fear, essentially fear of not being anybody, rather than of not being the right sort of person. The Trimmings and Hoopers in Waugh's fiction have no existence, while the right sort of people, though they are often sketched in an equally perfunctory way, always have their innate self-assurance brilliantly indicated. That self-assurance meant a very great deal to Waugh, and it would not be too much to say that the principal dynamic in his fiction is its attainment or retention. Both in his fictional world and in his own life he was the reverse of sycophantic. The upper classes were seen with a cold eye and often treated with the maximum rudeness. In part this was because they failed to live up to the standards Waugh imagined for them, standards which formed an integral part of his whole package of secular and religious romanticism. But ultimately this is less important in Waugh's world than his need to establish the character of his protagonists in terms of their self-assurance.

In *Decline and Fall*, the innocent whose innocence is itself a kind of unshakable worldliness. No more than Charles Ryder or Guy Crouchback is he ever really at a disadvantage. It is the same with Tony Last, in *A Handful of Dust*, whose pedigree is such that all his misfortunes and humiliations do not disturb the social poise his creator has invested in him. Tony knows how to behave, in a heartless world the clue to whose sesthetic construction is that it is the

world read about in the popular press, the world seen through the eyes of the couple on Brighton beach, where the prostitute's little girl is trying to persuade Tony to let her bathe. In the world as seen through the tabloids it is entirely plausible that the guilty wife should fear for a moment that her lover has died when the news of her child's death is broken to her, or that an explorer should be kept captive for ever in the Brazilian jungle.

*A Handful of Dust* is such an uncharacteristic tour de force in Waugh's world that Tony's solidarity with his peers in the other novels shows up as a very significant feature. The man who actually supplanted Waugh in his first wife's affections was, in fact, as we can see in Anthony Powell's memoirs, a great deal more like Tony Last, in terms of background and personality, than Waugh himself was. Brenda Last's lover, John Beaver, on the other hand, is a gruesome image of the kind of person Waugh most dreaded being seen as and taken for. So coolly brilliant a performance is *A Handful of Dust*, and so much an anti-character novel - that is to say a novel not embodying and indulging the idea of a character - that it is easy to overlook its deep affinity with the rest of Waugh's fiction. Guy Crouchback, with his continual failures in every department of life - civil, military and domestic - is a Tony Last transposed back into the "character" novel, the kind that in the end came most naturally to Waugh. The hero of *The Loved One*, even Gilbert Pinfold, given the slighter specification of their stories, are really brothers under the skin with Guy. Guy the loser who loses everything but himself, his own superbly established authenticity.

For it is one of the paradoxes of Waugh's art that when he was portraying, most obviously and most leisurely, a romantic self-projection, it becomes his most effective and convincing "character" part. Only his talent as an artist enabled Waugh to create Guy, and the more richly he is compromised with Waugh's own dreams and desires the more Guy becomes a reality. One of the reader's pleasures is to observe the ways in which he and the author studiously ignore the connection, though both know perfectly well what is going on. Authenticity in Waugh is always a kind of parody, or self-parody, and in a sense his tongue is never more in cheek than when he really lets himself go, magnificently, even movingly, so, as when we are treated to the roll-call of the Catholic gentry who attend Guy's father's funeral, the

evocation of life on a great Illyrian estate in *Helena*, or in the Imperial heartland of old Abyssinia, or the last hour of the heroine in *The Loved One*.

There is of course a price to be paid for the way in which art outwards life in Waugh's work, and it looms at the back of this extraordinarily rich collection of criticism assembled by Martin Stannard. Most reviewers at the time of publication, and most critics since, begin by using the *ad hominem* approach. Waugh is a reactionary, a fascist, a snob, a Catholic bigot. Almost all the more thoughtful critics though, as one notices, then move to an amendment of some sort. He is accused of *this* but he is really *that*: he is no satirist but a romantic or a Wodehousean humorist, no Céline but an unworried aesthete and craftsman. He is an empiricist of brutal good sense, never judging from the standpoint of fashion and ideology. In their different ways all Waugh's critics acknowledged the fact that as an artist he escaped from any merely personal shortcomings and limitations.

There is none the less a significant difference between English and American attitudes. American critics are almost unanimous in their dislike of post-war Waugh. For them he is a satirist or he is nothing, and for Joseph Frank in the *New Republic*, *Men at Arms* "illustrates the unhappy predicament of a satirist who has fallen in love with his subject". Delmore Schwartz in *Parisian Review* was particularly severe on Waugh's capitulation to Catholicism, a capitulation, as it seemed to him, without belief:

human beings are ridiculous without religious belief, and they are just as ridiculous when they are possessed by religious belief, but at least when they are truly religious they have a touching, pathetic, bewildered quality... no great fantasy is required to read his recent novels as the fiction of an agent provocateur in the pay of a society for the propagation of atheism.

Like other Americans, Delmore Schwartz had a knowledge of the world, and to a tradition of anarchy that had nothing provincial about it. But Americans who had no trouble with the more esoteric English aspects of Waugh's early fiction stuck at the upper-class Catholicism of *Brideshead Revisited* and its successors.

The early Waugh had been a successful outsider, always a sympathetic type; the later

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John Co 116



Waugh was a failed insider. From *A Handful of Dust* on, his fiction became increasingly a method of defending himself, by aesthetic means, from situations that disturbed his life or shook his confidence, and his war experiences clearly shook that confidence much more even than the defection of his first wife. For the first time he had to face real unpopularity, the knowledge that nobody wanted him in a responsible position, or even where his native pugnacity would have been a real asset. He was bad news in a context where obscure endurance and unspectacular toil were winning the war. So in effect he dismissed the war. He took refuge in a heroic and Catholic past, dedicated to failure of a sort acceptable to romance. He sank to second-hand Catholic metaphor – the “twich upon the thread” – of the sort purveyed by Chesterton and Belloc. The Waugh who had been so pungent and penetrating about foreign parts – Africa, America, above all Abyssinia – could not bring himself to do justice to the struggle he was really involved in, near to his fellow-soldiers.

But even this is controversial, as our admirable compilation so well brings out. Nothing about Waugh is uncontroversial; in that sense he and his masterpieces are characters like Falstaff and Hamlet, about whose real nature there can be endless dispute. One thing is certain: there is nothing bogus about any of his books, nothing diminished by time. Henry Reed, who more than most critics had a piercing eye for the bogus, wrote a brilliant review of *Brideshead Revisited* in the *New Statesman*, warmly praising its unique blend of evocation and sharp perception, its supple portraits of persons like Charles Ryder's father and Sebastian Flyte's mother – “patient, wonderful, cunning, and unbearable”. He admits the second-hand effects of the dogme, which weighs upon the end of plot like the Leninist theology in a Soviet Russian novel, but implies that the book makes a triumphantly realistic

use of its own fantasy, as, one might add, novels like *Daniel Deronda* have also done. Fantasy in Waugh is never under the counter. Their structure of continuous and vivid self-assertion ensures there is not the faintest whiff of hypocrisy in his novels. His vices are made more use of than his virtues, but it is important to the overall picture that Waugh strikes us in the last resort, and despite himself, as a fundamentally good egg.

In the absence of Waugh's friends the persona in the travel books, notably *Many-Two Days*, is wholly congenial, without at all attempting to be so. This basic truth seems to have struck Rose Macaulay, one of Waugh's most commonsensical and consistently affectionate critics, who usually reviewed his books in *Horizon*. She stood no nonsense from him, shaking her head over the unscholarliness of the Campion biography and the “Fascist tract” element in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, but on the whole she took him as he came, in the spirit of boys will be boys, and enjoyed his literary personality for its own sake. In *Waugh in Abyssinia* it is at its most direct, vividly confident; the book is still as fresh as paint, and hindsight makes its candid theism even more convincing. The Emperor had no clothes, as Waugh saw; his empire was a congerie of subject peoples held down by Abyssinian garrisons who despised and robbed them, offering none of the material progress which was the real if smug justification for European hegemony. The Italians at least brought good roads and good order, without the scourges of Marxism or militant Islam, and the present history of the area does nothing to contradict Waugh's observation.

His prejudices and his contempt for “the whinny of the nonconformist conscience” (a phrase now curiously dated) are none the less objectionable for that, as Rose Macaulay and other reviewers pointed out. No doubt he did see the Italian soldiers playing with Abyssinian children, and no doubt Marshal Graziani (who was later to be so signally defeated in the West) really did resemble “the traditional Italian prince”. As the book rises to its peroration it comes the more into the game away, and shows romance playing the same part that it does in *Helena*, *Campion*, or *Brideshead*. “New roads will be radiating to all points of the compass, and along them will pass the eagles of ancient Roma, as they came to

our savage ancestors in France and Britain and Germany.” Fascist Italy is neatly subsumed in the same category as the Roman empire and the Roman church. While Waugh's plain style reveals in the unregenerate, his high style indulges a vision of spiritual order and *Civitas Dei*, a traditional combination, and one as essential to his personality as to his pen.

Equally pleasurable and profitable to the scholar and researcher is the way in which Dr Stannard has included running fights between the critics, such as that in the *Listener* between Desmond MacCarthy, reviewing the Campion biography, and J. A. Kensit of the Protestant Truth Society. Donat O'Donnell (the sobriquet of Conor Cruise O'Brien) and T. J. Barrington engage in *The Bell* with Irish ease and expertise on the Catholic question, O'Brien making a brilliant comparison between Waugh and Proust, who “never took the decisive step from romanticism to the acceptance of dogme”. Stannard himself had an admirable piece, full of insights, in the *New Review* on the *Waugh Diaries*; he points to the continued presence in his life of the figure of Rossetti, subject of Waugh's first book, and quotes from it this extremely significant judgment. “There was fatally lacking in him [Rossetti] that essential rectitude that underlies the serenity of all great art”. As the *Diaries* show, Waugh strove for that rectitude, and as works of art his books do in their own way display its serenity.

Reviewing the Letters for the *Guardian*, Philip Larkin points out that Waugh's entourage, and his need for its rapidly heartless, upper-class gossip, was the worst thing about him. None the less his nature was “impenetrably indivisible”, writes Larkin in a striking phrase, even though, as with many great writers, his readers found in him what they sought. Thus Brigid Brophy in the *New Statesman* considered Waugh as a modified Fribank, another angel at writing, or rather “a baroque cherub on a funerary monument, forever ushering in the Dies Irae”. At one time or another every critic or fellow-artist seems to have had his say cast his net widely: the present reviewer was startled to find a place he did as a second-year undergraduate for the now defunct *Notional and English Review*. The only regrettable omission, but perhaps it was too recent to include, is Anne Pasternak-Slater's analysis in *Essays in Criticism of A Handful of Dust*.

## Traditional strengths

Mark Casserley

**KERRY McSWEENEY**  
Four Contemporary Novelists: Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul  
217pp. Scholar Press. £16.50.  
0859676730

In this study Kerry McSweeney champions the “representational and communicative strengths of the traditional novel” in the works of his chosen authors; he also believes that the ordinary mediating work of criticism is undervalued today, and therefore offers evaluations of all their novels, picking out general characteristics and dominant preoccupations.

McSweeney considers Angus Wilson's development to be representative of post-war changes in the English novel as a whole. In *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot*, Wilson is trying to combine nineteenth-century “diversity” with modernist “depth”, while his later recognition of the problematic nature of fiction lies behind the “alienating devices” in *No Laughing Matter*. But McSweeney points out that these devices also offer an outlet for what Wilson calls his “grand gulgnol side”, and goes on to suggest that the book is closer to *Tom Jones* and *Vanity Fair* than modern experimental fiction, thereby stressing Wilson's attachment to traditional English novelistic concerns.

John Fowles's existential point of view, his belief that “unknowing, or fagard, is as vital to man as water”, leads him to challenge and subvert those concerns; but McSweeney argues that the importance of the ideas Fowles believes he has to communicate gives him his commitment to “writing that wants to be read”. It is thus his narrative powers that receive emphasis: McSweeney finds him a writer

who “unfolds rather than grows”, and whose “paradigmatic methods of narrative presentation” do not vary: the central male character, for example, undergoes a *rite-de-passage* (Clegg, in *The Collector*, being a negative exemplar, in that he fails to change). Unfortunately, McSweeney's methods bring out the didactic and repetitive aspect of Fowles at the expense of the “richness” McSweeney praises.

An unvarying concern with the burden of the past and the primary of parental ties, and the recurring “basic paradigm” (dramatization of the crises in an ordinary person's life) in Brian Moore's fiction are seen as positive virtues in McSweeney's account. He asserts their importance, but he has more success in showing the expansion of Moore's range in the North American novels. The central influence on Moore's early development is “the celebration of the commonplace”; *I Am Mary Dunne*, however, shows a creative engagement with the Molly Bloom section of *Ulysses*.

McSweeney's impatience with Englishness – apropos of Fowles, he speaks of “that without which (it sometimes seems) no English novel can be conceived: a preoccupation with class” – lies behind his warmth towards Moore, and, in particular, V. S. Naipaul. In endorsing Naipaul's opinion that he has become less “colonial” while the English have become more so, McSweeney suggests that “a novelist of society and of traditional liberal values”, like Wilson, may be seen as the chronicler of a marginal society, while Naipaul is a novelist of “the unholding centre of the contemporary world”. Naipaul is the hero of this book: supported by his intelligence and sensibility, he refuses to escape into fantasy, or to “luxuriate in the creative continuities of the *Crise de roman*”.

## Fogg rides again

John Ure

**NICHOLAS COLERIDGE**  
Around The World In 78 Days  
220pp. Heinemann. £9.95.  
0434 140619

Most travel books fall between two poles. At one pole is the Remarkable Adventure: the Everest-in-gym-shoes or Across-the-Gobi-on-a-tricycle syndrome. At the other is the literary masterpiece: *Arabia Deserta* or *Old Calabria*. Books at the first pole are read out of curiosity or awe; those at the second for aesthetic pleasure. Most contemporary travel writing is an attempt to bring these two poles together: a notable experience is memorably described, and the result is a *Brazilian Adventure* or *Silver Walk in the Hindu Kush*. We admire the exploit and we relish the writing.

Nicholas Coleridge's exploit is not a breathtaking one, nor is his prose lapidary. But he had a jolly idea – to retrace Jules Verne's famed fictional traveltogue and try to better it. Eighty Days without resort to that new-fangled device, the aeroplane – and he brought to the task intrepid high spirits, an ingenious persistence, a columnist's eye for the pertinent anecdote or sartorial indicator, and a journalist's ear for dialogue.

The result is a rather breathless book: Coleridge is, perforce, always in a hurry to catch the next train, boat or rickshaw, and his writing-like himself – is perpetually hopping from topic to topic and from encounter to encounter in an atavistic and at times frenetic way. The mild excitement of the race does not adequately compensate for the absence of developed character or sustained observation. This mattered less with Jules Verne because, with the liberty of the novelist, he packed his narrative with startling incidents and spectacular adventures. Coleridge is handicapped by the requirement to be truthful or at least credible; not for him the luxury of rescuing Indian princesses or fighting off Redskins – though he does carry a swordstick and have the odd tricky moment.

It is just a hundred years since Jules Verne wrote his best-seller, and one might have imagined that the intervening century would have seen rapid strides in land and sea transport; is the reader shares Coleridge's frustrations of inaccurate timetables, cancelled sailings, delayed trains and non-existent taxis, the perception ultimately dawns that the Victorians organized these things rather better than we do. Of course, British readers will also reflect that Phineas Fogg had another great advantage over Coleridge: his route lay predominantly through lands of the British Empire and across seas dominated by Britannia, while now on the same route only Hongkong retains its Governor (not, incidentally, Governor-General as Coleridge maintains). Like Mussolini (in this, though heppily in little else) the British Raj had a gratifying way of ensuring that transport ran on time.

Perhaps realizing that he has to contend with a certain thinness of material, Coleridge strains a little hard at times. The parallel with Fogg's journey on an elephant across part of north India turns out to be no more than a few moments on the back of a circus elephant in Milan, and the descriptions of social life in Hongkong have the contrived gaiety of the gossip columnist.

But when he is further from Pall Mall or The Peak these mannerisms drop away and the ups and downs of the story take over. The vagaries of the Djibouti Sheraton are described with an engaging humour; the boredom of crossing the Arabian sea on a motorized dhow is memorably depicted without (no easy achievement) being boring itself; the earnest conversation about the Bombay-Medras train would find an honourable place in *The Great Railway Bazaar*, and the analysis of clinically clean Singapore rings sharply true.

It is to be hoped that Mr Coleridge will write other travel books and that when next he takes up his Gucci hiro (he lost the last one down the hole of the oriental convenience on the Madras express) he may give himself an occasional moment to stand and stare at the world.

## A monumental footnote

Stefan Collini

**NOEL ANNAN**  
Leslie Stephen: The godless Victorian  
432pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.50.  
0297 783696

“STEPHEN, Sir Leslie (1832-1904), first editor of this Dictionary, man of letters and philosopher; grandson of James Stephen (q.v.); third son of Sir James Stephen (q.v.), and younger brother of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen (q.v.). . . . When Maitland came to write the commemorative *Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* he mused on how the editor who had run his pen through so many over-long entries on forgotten worthies would have been at least equally severe in paring down his own entry: ‘educated at Eton and Trinity Hall . . . owing to some religious scruples he resigned the tutorship . . . became editor of the *Cornhill* and afterwards of this Dictionary . . . climbed the Schreckhorn’ and so forth; but I am not sure”, added Maitland knowingly, “that even the Schreckhorn would not have been suppressed”. Fortunately, his successors proved more indulgent, and even in the compressed record of the *Concise DNB* Stephen properly fills a whole column.

The bare facts point to a central Victorian cultural figure, central by heredity, education, and career. The curt “man of letters and philosopher” (Stephen would have been hugely gratified to find that second identity given such prominence) disguises the range of his writings, which were copious even by the expansive standards of his day: five volumes on the history of thought (including one minor masterpiece, *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*), five studies in the English Men of Letters series, three full-length “Life and Letters” biographies, two books of reminiscences, one large philosophical treatise, and well over 150 substantial essays, articles and introductions, some of which were collected in *Essays in Criticism*.

Three volumes of literary criticism, three more of rationalist controversy, two of public lectures, and still the end is not yet. Apart from his labours as editor of the *DNB*, he wrote an extraordinary total of 378 entries himself, many of them substantial pieces of scholarship (“I am surprised to find that I did so much in the way of articles” was his characteristic response on being informed of this number). In compiling the *Life*, Maitland confined himself, insofar as the unmistakable impress of his own rich talent would allow, to a fairly conventional narrative, expressing the hope that “someone will some day do for him what he to our admiration did for many others: illustrate in a small compass his life by his books, his books by his life; and both by his environment”.

Forty years on, Noel Annan took up Maitland's challenge, and his *Leslie Stephen: His thought and character in relation to his time*, published in 1951, quickly established a reputation as an exceptionally perceptive and readable piece of intellectual history. Together with a related essay that appeared a few years later on “The Intellectual Aristocracy”, it exercised a considerable influence on subsequent work in the whole field of Victorian studies; at the time, a relatively underdeveloped area of scholarly research. The book gave a particularly compelling account of the way in which the Evangelical upbringing of many of those who were to distinguish themselves as agnostics and doubters none the less exercised a pervasive power over their thought, especially in the form of the ceaseless scrutiny of motive and in the tangible pressure of the imperatives of duty and altruism. What in Annan's hands had the illuminating force of an original sketch has now come to be a rather obstructively mechanical explanation, routinely cited as the source of all that was distinctive about the moral world of late-nineteenth-century intellectuals; but the pioneer is hardly to be blamed for the stumps built by those who came after him. Still, Annan's lovingly compiled chart of the interconnected networks of family and education which constituted what he tellingly termed “The Intellectual Aristocracy” has been one of the most widely-cited articles in the literature of Victorian cultural history, even if some rather large claims about

the putatively homogeneous character of intellectual life in nineteenth-century England have been made on the basis of its essentially genealogical researches. Naturally, the field now looks rather different after the intensive work of the past three decades, and it is also true that more sources touching on Stephen's life, especially his family life, have become available. Meanwhile, Annan's original book had long since been allowed to go out of print.

*Leslie Stephen: The godless Victorian* is a very considerably re-written and expanded version of that book, too different merely to be considered a revised edition, too similar legitimately to stand as a genuinely new creation. Mark II is well over half as long again as Mark I, but the outlines of the original are still clearly visible, following essentially the same sequence of chapters, with very large sections of Mark I reproduced verbatim (the well-known chapter on “Evangelicalism”, for example, reappears almost unaltered). There is, I think, no ground for complaint about this. Simply to have re-issued the original would have invited charges of culpable laziness; to have started from scratch would, given its enduring merits, have seemed somewhat wilful. All that was valuable in the original seems to have been preserved, and the substitution of the slick new subtitle for its undeniably ponderous but accurate predecessor does not betoken any significant shift of tone in the book itself.

There are two main kinds of change from Mark I. The first is in the use of new source material, particularly in relation to Stephen's family life, where Virginia Woolf now becomes the chief witness (largely for the prosecution, it must be said, for Stephen's unreasonable domestic behaviour is recorded in vivid detail). The Maitland papers have also yielded a few nuggets. Perhaps as a result of the incorporation of this new material, Mark II is a bit more biographical in emphasis than Mark I. The portrait of Stephen is deepened but not fundamentally altered. Readers of Mark I would not have anticipated his daughter's

is an observation that falls naturally into place in the fuller account of Mark II. In addition, there is now a tantalizingly brief exploration of Stephen's manic-depressive tendencies and their possible connection with Virginia Woolf's fits of insanity. The other kind of change concerns the different emphases Annan now wishes to place in his interpretation of Stephen's thought or his account of its intellectual context. The only significant alteration in the former is the much fuller treatment of Stephen's very revealing relation to the eighteenth century, which he did much to rehabilitate after the extremes of the Romantic reaction. Drawing, with generous acknowledgment, on John Bicknell's work, Annan brings out the subtle ways in which Stephen's banding of Augustan Deism, which Stephen's banding of Augustan Deism, in particular, reflected the agnostic polemics of the 1860s and 70s. As far as the wider intellectual context is concerned, a prominent place is now assigned in modern cultural history (Annan does not shrink from large themes and broad brush-strokes) to what he calls “the German Renaissance” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cultural tour here, which takes us from Bach to Heisenberg as well as from Kant to Weber, really is a bit brisk, and it is more disconcerting still to discover that the important thing to be said about Stephen's connection with this “Renaissance” is that there is so little of it. Certainly there are large and interesting questions that could be raised about the relations, or lack of them, between English and German intellectual life during this period, but a study of Leslie Stephen does not seem the most obviously promising setting in which to try to raise them.

On the whole, these revisions and expansions, this last topsoil apart, are worked into the fabric of the original very harmoniously, and no one coming to the subject for the first time need feel the shadow of Mark I falling across these always very readable pages. The references grouped at the back of the book are, it has to be said, a grotty and somewhat disordered crew. As pedants to the unreviced passages, there are whole gangs of them which indicate clearly what was in fashion c1950, while elsewhere they are lost, not always unthinkingly, by several proudly sporting

the cut of the 1980s and in both cases some of them may seem a little underdressed by the standards of strict bibliographical propriety. The selection of secondary sources is idiosyncratic, to say the least, but it would be a foolish reader who came to this book for a reliable and impartial guide to recent scholarship when it has much richer, and rarer, treasure to offer.

Stephen is a demanding subject, at once attractive and daunting. His own skills as biographer, critic, and historian of thought threaten the clumsy or insensitive with invidious comparisons, and the treacherous thickets of his irony, modesty and other forms of self-defence will yield few of their secrets to any but a sophisticated inquirer. Maitland, who loved him dearly (“I think no man is so fond or as pleasant to me in every way”), had that instinctive delicacy of touch and quickness of mind that enabled him to meet Stephen on something like even terms. Consider, for example, how well he caught, unmasked, and at the same time paid affectionate homage to, Stephen's tone of only partly false modesty: “Indeed, at times if you adhered to the letter of Stephen's words, you would believe that he had sometimes looked at a few books, that he had now and then scribbled for newspapers, and that, by way of relaxation from this fatiguing toil, he had strolled across some rising ground in the neighbourhood of Grindelwald or Zermatt.”

Annan disclaims any ambition to try to emulate or replace Maitland, but although this book is not a biography it is a tribute to Annan's skill in evoking his subject's character that one finds oneself drawn to imagining Stephen, slumped in his usual rocking-chair, reading this more analytical, more critical, account of himself. There would, no doubt, be a larger than usual number of snorts and groans, though perhaps of sly embarrassment and tickled vanity as well as of irritation and dissent. The habit of years might lead the opening paragraphs of a review to get themselves written, and if so, he would be forced, as a

self-described “literary gent”, to acknowledge the professional polish and high quality of much of the writing. For Annan, too, can command an enviably light touch, rich in metaphor on some occasions, epigrammatically terse on others (“There has always been a good deal to be said against the Brontës and Stephen said most of it”). And of course, that corridor of English life which runs between Cambridge and London literary journalism and along which Stephen's generation were the first to move, is a beat not unknown to Annan himself. Perhaps Annan's own experience of public life has been more of an asset than one might expect in dealing with a retiring man of letters.

Other Victorian sages have in some ways been better served than Stephen by the immensely increased productivity of the scholarly industry in recent decades. While they are entombed in mausoleums of Collected Works and Annotated Letters, he, as he would no doubt have preferred, has escaped this honour; bookshops know him not, except insofar as he mingles with his vastly more numerous erstwhile theological adversaries on the second-hand shelves. It is also true that some of his contemporaries have been treated to more systematically researched and exhaustive biographies; many, certainly, have had more abundant garlands of learned articles laid on their graves. But none has been so sympathetically brought to life as the irritable, ironic, suffering, lovable figure who inhabits these pages. There is a depth of insight and sheer literary talent here that takes this book out of the company of the thoroughly footnoted, thoroughly dull academic monograph. Stephen said, in one of those characteristic moments of revealingly false modesty, that he would only merit a footnote in the history of his age, an oddly reconcilable final resting-place to have anticipated. How much more appropriate that he should get, not a footnote, but this spacious, opinionated and humane study of “his thought and character in relation to his time”.

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John Ure



# The intellectual climatologist

Michael Howard

R. J. BULLEN, H. POGGE VON STRANDMANN  
and A. B. POLONSKY (Editors)  
*Ideas into Politics: Aspects of European  
history 1880-1950*  
225pp. Croom Helm. £15.95.  
0 7099 0696 X

The Festschrift is deservedly unpopular as a literary form. Publishers dislike it because it does not sell. Academics find it irritating because the connecting thread - reverence and gratitude to a distinguished scholar - is seldom enough to bind the contents into a coherent whole, and so work of great if recondite value may remain unobserved in rather unlikely company. Whatever the quality of its contents, two cheers are as much as any Festschrift is likely to get from even the most sympathetic reviewer. But *Ideas into Politics* deserves both. First, James Joll has in his quiet way had a major influence on European historians over the past quarter of a century, and well deserves to be thus honoured. And second, the approach which he has himself practised and encouraged in his pupils, an approach well defined in the title of this collection, provides an element of unity which gives the work unusual coherence.

Professor Joll is an intellectual historian - indeed an *intellectual's* historian - of a kind unusual in Britain. The rest of us realize that the philosophers and the artists are there and that we ought to be aware of what they are doing. Even if we cannot understand the former or appreciate the latter, we know that the history we write, whether political, military, economic or social, will be incomplete and one-sided if it does not at least take account of *Kulturgeschichte*. But Joll starts with the thinkers and artists, and establishes the intellectual climate before exploring the events and processes which other historians, whether traditional or Marxist, regard as primary. History, that we cannot understand their actions unless we understand their ideas, he they formulated or unformulated. For him philosophy is not superstructure but bedrock. In his *History of Europe since 1870* there is something magnifi-

cent, if at times irritating, about the didactic with which he treats the world of finance and industry and focuses on intellectual currents. It comes as no surprise to learn that as an undergraduate he read Greats. It gave him a range and intellectual curiosity too often denied to historians with more orthodox backgrounds.

As the valuable bibliography in this Festschrift makes clear, much of Joll's work has to be excavated from other Festschriften and comparable collections of articles put together by scholarly entrepreneurs. This goes, unfortunately, for his much quoted and deservedly renowned Inaugural Lecture for the Stevenson Chair in the University of London, 1914: *the Unspoken Assumptions*. It is a pity that the editors did not reprint it as an introduction to this collection. Not only did it crystallize Joll's own thinking, as any Inaugural properly should, but it rescued the 1914 debate from the arid controversies about guilt and responsibility, based on microscopic study of diplomatic documents, and opened up an entire new area for historical inquiry. It deserves to be made far more widely available.

It is within these areas, of the intellectual and conceptual background to political action, that the contributions to this collection very largely fall. The bulk of them deal with the inter-war years, focusing largely on Germany. Three deal with the pre-war period and four with developments since 1945. These last, by Charles Maier, Anthony Nicholls, Volker Bergahn and Roger Bullen, have a particular coherence, in that they trace the development, in the United States and elsewhere, of those ideas of liberal capitalism, the interaction of state power and economic enterprise, which led to the achievement of Ludwig Erhard's "economic miracle" in West Germany and the implementation of the Schuman Plan; the foundation, in fact, of the open society in which we now live. They come like benign sunshine after the *Sturm und Drang* described by the earlier contributors, focusing as they Nazi Germany, European Marxism, Fascism

There are two essays on "international history", traditional in their approach though fitting well into the general theme of the collection. Paul Kennedy describes the changing atti-



Anton von Werner's painting "Einhüllung des Richard Wagner-Denkmal im Triergarten", 1908, referred to in the article by Iain Boyd Whyte on page 1128.

tude of Britain and Germany towards the United States at the turn of the century; Britain coming to see her not as a cantankerous competitor but as a like-minded ally whose expansion was to be welcomed, Germany abandoning benevolent detachment for ideological hostility. Zara Steiner shows how even after 1918 the British Foreign Office continued to believe that Britain could protect her imperial interests yet hold the political balance between France and Germany in Europe (though, poor things, what else were they to believe?).

Elsewhere, David Schoenbaum briskly condemns the military in inter-war Germany for having aspirations to conquest far beyond their capacity to fulfil them; though he rather begs the question as to what the aspirations of the military actually were. Robin Lehman and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann deal respectively with mass-culture and heavy industry in the Weimar Republic and the part both played in undermining its political system. Jeremy Nokes shows how the Nazi policy of sterilized views about eugenics in Germany and elsewhere; and Tim Mason examines the failure of the German social democrats and communists to resist Nazism.

The inter-war years are completed by two

contrasting studies in Fascism: Roderick Kedward on Charles Maurras (if indeed that unique oddity can be classified as anything) and Andrew Polonsky on the Pole, Roman Dmowski, whose contempt for German "cadence" led him to look to Italy for a model. Kedward's excellent judgment on Maurras could do service for both: his "mental constructs were designed to protect him from human realities rather than to explain or understand them". This is Jollism at its best.

Jollism at its best is also to be found in David Morgan's essay on Marxism in pre-1914 Germany, which not only shows how Marxism itself was transformed by positivism and social Darwinism into dialectical materialism, but explains why the SPD, in spite of its massive support, was politically so impotent and inept. But the jewel of the collection, for my money, is Modris Epstein's study of pre-war modernism in Germany, which makes clearer to us than anything I have yet read why German intellectuals welcomed "the war as a new *Bildungszeitung*, and why it was that, intellectually, the Germans might be said to have won the war. But altogether it is an excellent collection. As so often with Croom Helm, one regrets that they could not produce it in a decent format, but is grateful to them for publishing it at all.

## Fatherland, state and nation

Roger Morgan

WERNER WEIDENFELD  
*Die Identität der Deutschen*  
355pp. Munich: Carl Hanser.  
3 446 12859 3  
RICHARD VON WEIZSÄCKER  
*Die Deutsche Geschichte geht weiter*  
318pp. Berlin: Siedler.  
3 886 00849  
KLAUS WEIGELT (Editor)  
*Helmut und Identität der Deutschen*  
342pp. Mainz: Von Hase und Kohler.  
3 7758 10668  
RENATA FRITSCH-BOURNAZEL, ANDRÉ BRIGOT and JIM CLOOS  
*Les Allemands au cœur de l'Europe*  
270pp. Paris: Fondation pour les Etudes de Défense Nationale.  
2 85789 037 0

"Has the Federal Republic, which the founding fathers of the constitution planted so bravely in the devastated landscape of German history, regained a mere collective object (*Gemeinwesen*) without an identity?" This question posed by the historian Michael Stürmer in Werner Weidenfeld's collection of essays on "The Identity of the Germans" sounds over-dramatic to English ears, but it summarizes a lot of present-day German heart-searching. Indeed, observers of the German intellectual scene in recent years have been increasingly puzzled, and sometimes alarmed, by the widespread re-opening of questions once regarded as settled. Is the German nation still one and indivisible, despite four decades of separation into two states? Should the short-lived and precarious unity that lasted from Bismarck to Hitler be seen as a "normal" situation, or should the Germans be regarded as

accepting their post-1945 partition as a return to the other "normalcy" of their entire history up to 1871? Such questions, which involve both interpreting the past and making choices for the future, have been given increasing urgency by the political developments of the 1970s and 80s. As the books under review indicate from different angles, the impetus has come both from internal factors, such as the coming-of-age of new generations, unconvinced that Germany's division was inevitable, and unburdened by the inhibitions of their elders; and also from external developments such as the breakdown of East-West détente, the faltering of West Germany's hopes for *Ersatz-Vaterland*, the European Community, and the consequent emergence of the Federal Republic as an economic giant, a power strong enough to stand up for Germany's national interests - if only it could decide just how to define them.

In the first stage of this new articulation of the German interest, the running was made by the Left: by the neutralist peace movements of West Berlin and West Germany (with faint echoes from the East German side); by such Left-wing intellectuals as Peter Bender, Günter Gaus and Peter Brandt; and finally by the post-Schmidt Social Democratic Party, whose 1983 election campaign included a strong assertion of "German interests" against the Reagan Administration's deployment of missiles in Europe.

Some of the authors in Professor Weidenfeld's symposium are, or have been, associated more with the Left than the Right of the spectrum. They include Professor Kurt Sontheimer, whose subtle disavowal here of the concept of the "special course" (*Sonderweg*) of German history underlines the disasters that have resulted from Germany's deviations from the mainstream of West European liberalism and national development; and also two historians

currently working in London and Paris respectively, Wolfgang Mommsen and Rudolf von Thadden, represented here by essays on the problems of discontinuity in the concepts of "fatherland", "state", and "nation", in German history.

However, this book as a whole must be seen as part of the efforts now being made by German intellectuals of the centre and centre-right to show that they too, despite their more publicly emphasized alignment with the United States and NATO's nuclear policy, are by no means prepared to let concern with "the German question" remain a monopoly of the Left.

The main theme of the book is set out in the long introductory section by the editor, a Mainz University political scientist who is known to be close to the Christian Democratic Chancellor, Helmut Kohl. The theme is that of the relationship between past, present and future; given that the Federal Republic, although a German state, is not coterminous with the German nation, how can German statesmen maintain a balance between their responsibility for that nation as a whole, their need to conduct official dealings with the other German state, and their relationships with their Western neighbours and American allies? Weidenfeld and his co-authors offer a fascinating exploration of this question and its ramifications in Germany's past and present collective consciousness, though as scholars they stop short of giving a detailed answer in terms of policy prescriptions. However, as Richard von Weizsäcker remarks in his own book-length contribution to the debate on Germany's future, "a question does not cease to exist simply because no one knows the answer to it". Von Weizsäcker's thoughtful and statesmanlike discussion of some central aspects of recent German history (starting with

the 1944 bomb plot undertaken by anti-Hitler circles to which he belonged) was written while he was Mayor of West Berlin. It galvanized interest through his recent election as President of the Federal Republic: observers will be especially interested to see how far he can use the representational possibilities of his new office to promote the reconciliation between Eastern and Western Europe for which he plods so eloquently in these pages.

The collection of essays edited by Klaus Weigelt of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation deals with "the German question" at a different level, but still an interesting one: an exercise in *haute vulgarisation*, this survey of "Homeland and Nation: on the History and Identity of the Germans" deals with these basic concepts in a way designed to improve German citizens' awareness of the relationships between state and nation, East and West, Federal Republic and Europe. Non-Germans who can read the language will learn a good deal from these lucid and balanced chapters.

The French have always, for obvious reasons, tended to react to any indications of a revival of the *Inquiétudes allemandes* with particular concern. In contrast to much alarmist French speculation about the growth of "national-neutrality pacifism", Dr Renata Fritsch-Bournazel and her co-authors, in a study published by the Fondation pour les Etudes de Défense Nationale, present an objective and well-documented account of the subject. They analyse very perceptively the tensions arising from Germany's position "au cœur de l'Europe" (echoes of Madame de Staël's classic *De l'Allemagne*), and they bring out the high degree to which Germany's internal stability depends on the structure of NATO and the European Community - and also, importantly, for all of us, vice versa.

## A growing capacity to harm

Peter Pulzer

GORDON A. CRAIG  
*The End of Prussia*  
The Curti Lectures, 1982  
102pp. University of Wisconsin Press. £14.25.  
0 299 09730 7

Prussia is an idea whose time has gone; hence, possibly, the current revival of interest in it. There is something palpable about a polity whose history is complete and about a civilization that has come to a full stop. At its funeral there are mixed feelings. When the Allied Control Council pronounced their retrospective death sentence on February 25, 1947, "in the interests of preservation of peace and security of peoples and with the desire to assure further reconstruction of the political life of Germany on a democratic basis", they spoke for a wide consensus. Any mourners would have had to be discreet.

After the funeral there is a period of repression. The past that Prussia represents is too painful. For some - probably for most - it loomed as one of the contributory causes of the catastrophe, with its love of authority and its addition to violence. For others - it is difficult to guess how many - it was a distant vision of a world still in one piece. Either way, it does not beg thinking about.

The sons, it is said of American immigrants, want to forget, the grandsons want to remember. So, too, it seems, do the exiles from Prussia. The past few years have seen a flood of books, for the study as well as the coffee-table, and a revival of public interest that culminated in the great Prussian Exhibition in Berlin, in 1981, with which Gordon A. Craig was associated. Why the revival? In part, no doubt, a shift of fashion. Nothing stays "out" for ever and the flux and reflux of fashion are fairly indiscriminate. We have, after all, had a *Hilder-Welle* as well as a *Preussen-Welle*. But one can think of two other, more legitimate, reasons for the revival of interest. The first is the passage of time has lifted a taboo, making Prussia once more a fit topic for conversation. The second is that nostalgia implies a discontent with the present.

Prussia is a crucial factor in the definition of Germany's national identity: it is both an obstacle and an aid. Historically, as Professor Craig shows in the third of his four lectures, it confused the issue in the course of trying to resolve it. Its leaders tried to create a new Germany to 1871 without sacrificing the old Prussia; and many of the new Germany's citizens thought there was too much of the old Prussia to make the Empire credible and acceptable. Wilhelm I acknowledged the ambiguity of his role when he confessed to Bismarck that the day of his coronation as Emperor would be the unhappiest of his life.

But in retrospect Prussia helps to redeem German self-esteem and the German sense of culture, as opposed to political unity. It can stand as an example of "the other Germany" of Protestant virtues as against materialist excesses of Weimar democracy and resistance to Hitler. Above all, its territory and heritage straddle the frontier of the two Germanies. The DDR, as well as the Federal Republic, now celebrates its Prussian past: Sans-Souci has been restored, Frederick the Great is back on his horse in Unter den Eichen, Scharnhorst has rated a television serial and even Bismarck is on the way to rehabilitation.

So, for the first time ever, we can see Prussia in perspective, *sine ira et studio*, and that is what Craig helps us to do in these beautifully crafted lectures. He presents his subject through the eyes of, of, of, protagonists, grouped in pairs, each of whom had a certain idea of Prussia: the reformer Stein and his opponent Marwitz, the romantic Bettina von Arnim and the realist Bismarck, the fastidious Theodor Fontane and the bombastic Wilhelm II, and the two incompatible democrats, Otto Braun and Konrad Adenauer.

All fall into that era which Craig defines as the end of Prussia, a process rather than a single event that began for him with the defeat by Napoleon's armies at Jena in 1806 - the first of the high degree to which Germany's internal stability depends on the structure of NATO and the European Community - and also, importantly, for all of us, vice versa.

other unPrussian qualities. It is an interesting thesis, though it restricts the era of the true Prussia to a rather short span of its history as a state. If we agree that Prussia as a European power, with its characteristic social-military structures, does not appear before the beginning of the seventeenth century, then we are left with about 200 years out of the 500 that followed the accession of the Hohenzollerns.

That is not, in itself, a fatal objection. Perhaps slightly less convincing are his assumptions, or the assumptions of his witnesses, about discontinuities between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. A great many of their criticisms of the Prussia of their day one may assent to. Bettina von Arnim thought the plight of the poor was due to the indifference of the bureaucracy and the Church. Fontane saw that behind the landowners' prattle about duty and honour there lay naked self-interest: "Prussia, and to some extent all Germany, is sick because of its East Elbian...". Why does Germany make such a bad impression in the world? Because "thousands of these personalities from the stone age are running around". But when von Arnim exonerates Friedrich Wilhelm IV with "the evil intrigues that encircle the lofty spirit of a prince" and Pontane catalogues the virtues of the old-style Quitzows and Yorck von Wartenburgs, are they talking about a Prussia that ever really existed, or is it yet another mythical golden age with which to belabour the pinchbeck of the present?

That Prussia had been corrupted by success, a recurring theme in everything Fontane wrote, was undeniable. Greed and conspicuous display affected all classes, not just the *nouveaux-riches*. Military prowess degenerated into *Schneidigkeit* (flashiness), landownarship into tariff lobbying. There was, above all, the baneful influence of Bismarck. In vain can one point out that after 1871 he pursued policies of peace, balance and restraint. What the world remembered was the "demonic" what is evident to us is how the passage of time has lifted a taboo, making Prussia once more a fit topic for conversation. The second is that nostalgia implies a discontent with the present.

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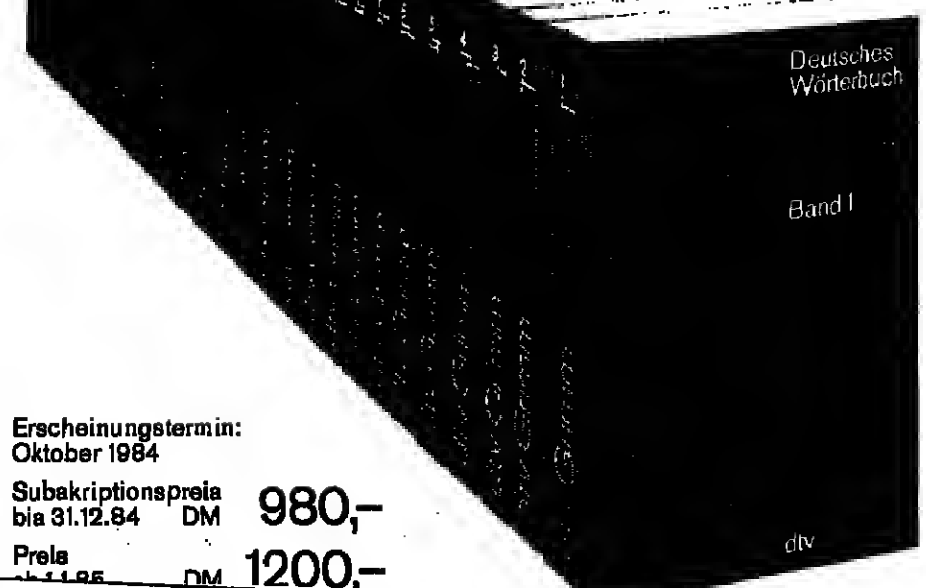


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## Among the men of violence

Philip French

WILLIAM KENNEDY

Ironweed

227pp. Viking. £7.95.

0670401765

Legs

317pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.50.

0140064842

Billy Phelan's Greatest Game

282pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.50.

0140063404

Several of the most interesting new writers in the United States over the past dozen years have been exploring the lives of hyphenated Americans on the underside of decaying northern cities that have not, in this century at least, attracted the attention of literary men the way New York, Chicago and Los Angeles have. The former Massachusetts district-attorney George V. Higgins has opened up the world of loquacious, foul-mouthed Boston-Irish crooks, cops, priests and politicians. Eimore Leonard, after years spent labouring in the vineyards of pulp fiction, is now being acclaimed for his laconic thrillers about Italian and Irish low-lifers migrating between Detroit and Miami. And the one-time newspaperman William Kennedy, also turning to fiction in early middle-age, has embarked on a cycle of novels that seek to aggrandize the seamy side of his native Albany, the once fiercely proud, now run-down capital of New York State, located 150 miles north of Manhattan on the Hudson River, and in the nineteenth century a major staging-post for immigrants heading west.

Virtually all of Kennedy's characters are Irish-Americans who have kissed the Blarney Stone by proxy, and he launched his dance to the muzak of crime in 1975 with *Legs*, a racy fictionalized life of the mad, bad and dangerous Prohibition gangster Jack "Legs" Diamond. A lecherous, silver-tongued killer, often and erroneously thought to be Jewish (of Irish extraction, born in Philadelphia as John T. Noland in 1896, and murdered in an Albany rooming-house in 1931 at the age of thirty-five while attempting to make himself king of the Catskills).

In *Legs*, four Irish-American octogenarians assemble at an Albany bar in 1975 to reminisce about the Jack they knew in more abluent times. They are a fair cross-section of Kennedy types – an ex-madam, a former crime reporter, an ancient bartender, and the book's principal narrator, Marcus Gorman, a successful criminal lawyer so excited by the glamorous world of crime that he thought his dreams of bourgeois success well lost when a promising political career was blighted by associating with Diamond. To Gorman, *Legs* was "one of the truly new American Irishmen of his day: Horatio Alger out of Finn McCool and Jesse James, shipping the dream that you could grow up in America and shoot your way to glory and riches". He is "an ancestral paradigm for the modern urban gangster". Westergate and *The Godfather* were very much on America's mind when *Legs* appeared, which occasioned a crucial comment from Gorman:

I don't want to trivialize Jack's achievement by linking him to lesser latter-day figures such as Richard Nixon, who left sufficient history in his wake but no legend: whose corruption, overwhelmingly venal and invariably hypocritical, lacked the admirable white core-fantasy that can give evil a mythical dimension.

The second novel in this cycle, *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, published in 1978, focuses on a professional gambler, pool-player and bowling champion. The year is 1938 and the boss of the Albany political machine, Charles McCall, has his son kidnapped while a rigged election is in progress, and the crime-busting WASP Tom Dewey is threatening to clean up the state. Pressure is put on the hero, Billy Phelan, to discover whether a Jewish gambler of his acquaintance is involved. He refuses to act as an informer and is made a social pariah, banned from every bar, pool-hall and card-game in Albany by the victim's father. Eventually a star local journalist, Martin Daugherty, intervenes, and with the assistance of Damon Runyon gets a column into an Albany evening paper that vindicates and reinstates Billy. The book has an epigraph from Huizinga's *Homo*

*Ludens* and the title refers equally to an epic bowling contest Billy engages in and to his holding out against the political bullies.

The latest book, *Ironweed*, continues from, and overlaps with, *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*. It tells in discursive form the life story of Billy's father, Francis Phelan, who at the age of fifty-eight has returned to his family after a twenty-two-year absence. Francis was a radical firebrand at the turn of the century, and a lethal stone, that he threw with the accuracy that was later to make him a baseball star, killed a scab during the 1901 Albany trolley-car strike. A bloody riot is triggered off, sending Francis into middle-western exile. He returns to marry and raise a family, then flees again in 1916 after accidentally killing his two-week-old son. His life thereafter is that of a wandering Celtic hero, though one very much coloured by his times.

Certain characters recur in the books, most notably the McCall family of political fixers and the lawyer Marcus Gorman, who having dominated *Legs* makes fleeting appearances in *Billy Phelan* and *Ironweed*, successfully defending Francis Phelan on a charge of voting twenty-one times in the same election by using the cheap courtroom tricks that had kept Diamond out of gaol. And we become familiar with the city's geography and cherished landmarks, like the plush Kenmore Hotel and the public park that boasts statues of both Robert Burns and Moses. Kennedy is fascinated and appalled by the history of Albany, and is as proud of its literary associations with Melville and Henry James as he is of the men of violence who gathered there.

What holds the books together so far is a controlling vision of American society, or at least the Irish contribution to it, that is a curious mixture of warped idealism, mysticism, a need to create legends and heroes, and a notion of transcendental style that is contained in the concept of having "class". The chief protagonist of each book is thought of as being touched by magic. The gangster Jack Diamond, who may have been the model for his fellow Irish-American Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, has miraculously survived a succession of ambushes that have left his body a battleground of wounds. The journalist Martin Daugherty treats Billy Phelan as an existential hero, and Daugherty's playwriting father, in his day the peer of Eugene O'Neill, wrote a play about the 1901 strike called *The Car Barn* that was inspired by Francis Phelan. Diamond, Francis Phelan and his son Billy are violent, destructive men, in flight from an oppressive, guilt-ridden religion, and from that joyless domesticity created by women who see themselves as upholders of proper Catholic values.

Kennedy is aware of the dangers of his enterprise, and the observer of his most unlikely hero asks himself, "Martin Daugherty, why are you so obsessed with Billy Phelan? Why make a heroic play out of a simple chump?" Daugherty is blessed with a form of double vision rather like that possessed by the extraterrestrial in Nicolas Roeg's film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Not only can he foresee the future but the past is so real that palpable images of it haunt him as he walks around town. Somewhat folksier is the gift of Francis Phelan. Prematurely senile at the age of fifty-eight, he has conversations with his infant son and other inhabitants of Albany Catholic cemetery. His behaviour is easily excused because the corpses talk among themselves, and we are reminded of the scene in the New England graveyard that ends Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. There are also strong resemblances between *Ironweed* and Wilder's novel *The Eighth Day*, where a mid-western miner sets off on a lifetime's wandering exile after being off on a lifetime's wandering exile after being the accidental agent of a man's death in 1902. It is indeed possible that Kennedy is bringing back the all-American feyness, sentimental fatalism and woozy rhetoric that made Wilder so popular some forty years ago.

So far Kennedy has written, and occasionally over-written, some eloquent chapters of literary social history. His sense of place is exact, his dialogue unerring, his big heart and robust humour endearing. The three books modify and fortify each other. They do not, yet, however, as Saul Bellow appears to believe, constitute a substantial oeuvre, but they might well be the beginning of one.

## The rare creature's human sounds

David Coward

JULIAN BARNES

Flaubert's Parrot

190pp. Cape. £8.50.

0224 022229

*Flaubert's Parrot* is an extraordinarily artful mix of literary tomfoolery and high seriousness. It deals ostensibly with the efforts of an amateur Flaubert enthusiast to identify the stuffed bird that served as a model for the parrot which hovers over the head of Félicité in the final paragraph of *Un Coeur simple*. Geoffrey Braithwaite, sixty-plus, widower, retired general practitioner and British down to his initials, commits himself to his quest with a self-deprecating yet embattled persistence. When the facts fall him, he widens the search. He writes learned notes about parrots in the work of Flaubert, ransacks the novels and correspondence for clues, and attempts to wrinkle out the mystery from the life and times, friends and enemies of a writer who hated intrusions into his private life. When this too fails, Dr Braithwaite is led to wondering how the past – any past – may be truly grasped. The present treats what has been like a poor relation, adopting a superior stance and assuming that fitness a hundred years ago, or the colour of redcurrant jam, were then what they are now. He writes to a jam manufacturer for expert testimony and gets a perhaps. This is all he gets too from Flaubert scholars who murder as they dissect.

But the past is only one aspect of truth. What is truth? For instance, you can look at Flaubert from many angles and each angle will tell you something. Dr Braithwaite collects views of Flaubert – from museums, from critics, from his contemporaries. He visits the shrines at Rouen and Croisset. He tries to get inside Louise Colet. He even tries to be Flaubert by writing his own *soufflé* based on the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. But all his angles do not add up to an angle. How many half-truths are needed to make the whole truth? The truth about Flaubert is uncertain and each certainty is certain to be undermined by a coincidence or an irony.

Why then does he persist? Dr Braithwaite fills his head with parrot squawking because his mind is preoccupied by another, more immediate problem. He is a discreet and reticent man who does not find it easy to speak of himself. How shall he make a meaning of his married life, of his wife's death, if simple truths about jam and stuffed birds alude him? Mrs Braithwaite was a good wife but not faithful: no Emma Bovary, but a careless and bruisable suburban adulteress who never quite showed him up but ultimately let him down. Now it's over and he wonders what love is, what truth is, what the past is. Flaubert got it right but what precisely he got right Dr Braithwaite finds it difficult to say – and even Flaubert himself was never too sure. In one sense, the quest is a form of therapy. In another, it is a restatement of old questions. To look no further: what exactly is Flaubert's parrot?

### Frankenstein

Or The Modern Prometheus

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

Illustrated by Barry Moser. Afterword by Joyce Carol Oates

Mary Shelley's classic tale of moral transfiguration is given a startling new dimension in this California edition of the Pennyroyal Press *Frankenstein*. Avoiding the conventional image of Shelley's "monster", Moser's brooding and foreboding woodcut illustrations bring out the psychological essence of the book and allow us to discover the work anew. In a vivid sequence of illustrations we witness the gradual shaping of the monster from the darkness – remaining partially obscured until over half way through the book he is suddenly revealed in several horrific close-ups in which yellow and then red are added to the established black and white. After these shocks, the monster then disappears until we see him again at the very end of the book in a stunning blue death mask. The overall effect of Moser's unique art is to make this the most powerful edition of Shelley's masterpiece.

December c. £27.15 Hardback 277pp illus. 0-520-05281-1

It is, of course, the creature from Flaubert's story. Unless it is the stuffed bird at the museum in the Hôtel-Dieu at Rouen. Or that slightly less intimidating rival exhibit at the Croisset pavilion. That is, if it isn't the good doctor himself, *Flaubertus redivivus*. After all, he has a Flaubertian eye for irony and the grotesque, and he willingly embraces the Master's view that the human race is irredeemably stupid. Still, a coincidence or an irony all too easily knock him off his perch, and besides, he has a pawky individualism which makes him his own man. In that case, shall we say that the parrot is Life which repeats and mimics itself just as episodes in Flaubert's life parrot his work? If not, then it is Language: the choicest words are not much better than the chatter of this "rare creature that makes human sounds" and mocks with gaudy, ghastly parodies our attempts to move the stars to pity. But this reads like a bitter and defeated description of the writer as "a sophisticated parrot". Perhaps then we should simply accept what Dr Braithwaite says – that it is "a fluttering, elusive emblem" of Flaubert's voice. Yet we remember the Master's mistrust of metaphor, and in any case, critics, curators, the nineteenth century, our own times, you and I all hear different voices. The clever reader will conclude that the parrot of the title is not any one of these, but all of them. There are as many parrots as there are readers. Or Flauberts.

Dr Braithwaite, who can be very sharp-tongued about critics, would not be satisfied with as little. He persists in his search for truth not as an intellectual exercise but out of personal need. In this sense he is that old-fashioned thing, a scholar who seeks knowledge for its own sake and for what it may do to make him wise. So very different from the modern version, the academic researcher who, self-regarding and self-advertising, churns out footnoted, deadening articles each constituting a professional leg-up and each banging another nail in the coffin of understanding. Dr Braithwaite would not be happy with the multi does it dilute and disperse the truth he seeks but it stems directly from the unconquerable *hélise* which Flaubert himself deplored. It is a fancy answer, an instant, kwik-brew, identikit, "all you need to know about Flaubert to know as much as the next person" answer. Dr Braithwaite can be fey: self-mocking he covets an page of *TLS* glory and introduces us to an American scholar who is pathologically scrupulous in the matter of literary ethics. But he is wary of the professionals – he is dreadfully rude about Enid Starkie – and he positively smites the philistines of modern fiction who take all the short-cuts and massage the prejudices of their readers. Gleeefully appointing himself "a dictator of literature", he imposes bans and quotas on campus novels, growing-up novels, novels set in South America, reworkings of the classics, the theme of incest, tales of natural savagery lurking beneath the veneer of civilization and others besides, because a cliché is a particularly raucous squawk and as untruthful as the importance given by critics to an author's mistakes. He is furious with Dr Starkie for accusing Flaubert of inconsistency in describing the colour of Emma Bovary's eyes. He exults when he in turn points out that the portrait of Flaubert "by an unknown painter" which serves as a frontispiece to her *Making of the Master* (1967) is in fact a painting of Louis Boullet.

What then are we to think when the scrupulous scholar is careless with the date of Flaubert's earliest surviving composition? When the dictator of literature constructs a reworking of Louise Colet's view of Flaubert? When the exact stylist asks, anent the sexual irregularity of the nineteenth century, "who shall escape whipping"? Mistakes or omissions? For Dr Braithwaite is nothing if not playful. He devises programmes for researchers ("Pets at Croisset", "The Ethics of English Governesses Abroad") and sets an examination paper for his reader. He makes jokes and he plants seeds – an image, a quote, a thought – which sprout at a later point in his story, catching us unaware, hitting us with an artful coincidence or a prepared twist of irony: irony does not exist without an ironist. What then is the truth about Dr Braithwaite?

He is a man who sees quite clearly that the past is elusive and truth ungraspable: behind every parrot there is another parrot. Like Flaubert, he recognizes that the joke is on him and he accepts the fact with modesty and, if only for the sake of good manners, with dignity. Happiness lies in anticipation and in the memory of anticipated happiness. His quest ends in farce – the ironic thing about truisms is that they are true – but he has gained enough wisdom from the parrots he has scrutinized to know that the joke is cosmic, that it is played on him as it is played on Flaubert, Mrs Braithwaite, critics, curators and parrots. The quest is the thing. If he were a religious man, he would surely quote Pascal: he who seeks has found.

## Trans-European

Ian Bell

JACQUES RÉDA

L'Herbe des talus

216pp. Paris: Gallimard. 75 fr.

21070701468

*L'Herbe des talus* is a whimsical succession of personal experiences remembered from Jacques Réda's boyhood and, so it would seem, his mid-twenties. There is nothing dramatic or unusual about them beyond the charm of their telling. The book begins with a reflection in free verse on his father's grave on which in her own lifetime his mother had already had her name engraved; and it ends with a skillfully constructed sonnet which he calls "Tombeau d'un démon livide". In between are reminiscences of his youthful sports and ambitions, his encounters with ordinary and not so ordinary people and the insights he has come to in the course of his travels, first in widely scattered parts of

Greece and the Scottish Highlands, and into obscure recesses of capital cities – London and Vienna, Athens and Prague, Rome and Budapest. Réda's allusive and sometimes hermetic style transfigures even the most earthy of the characters he recalls: the monosyllabic Mrs Henderson of Garve is not likely to be forgotten by the reader any more than by the writer. He seldom refers to other writers, but at the head of one chapter is a short quotation from Valéry Larbaud, and in Jacques Réda, now in his mid-fifties, there lurks the youthful restlessness of Barnabooth, exemplified by his now (alas outmoded) delight in railway trains.

Brenda R. Silvar's *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* is a descriptive catalogue, indicating (with examples) the contents of the *Notebooks*, and not, as it was described in John Batchelor's review (*TLS*, August 10), an edition.

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# Irresistibly rising

## Norman Hampson

JEAN TULARD  
Napoleon: The myth of the saviour  
Translated by Teresa Waugh  
470pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £14.95.  
0297 784390

It was a good idea to publish an English translation of Jean Tulard's *Napoleon*, but not one like this. Even by present-day standards the proof-reading is exceptionally sloppy and there are mistakes all over the place. The printers have a curious affection for 1880, which is given as the equivalent of the year VIII and also as the date of Napoleon's Spanish campaign. On the whole, though, one can deal with the misprints, which sometimes provide light relief, as when army corps become "crops", which is an original way of beating swords into ploughshares. More serious is the quality—or lack of it—of the translation. Place-names are sometimes anglicized and sometimes not. Readers are not likely to have much trouble with Gand, Damas, Saxe and the Escart, but the unwary may not recognize the Turkish Government as La Porte or realize that the *Section Lepelletier* has been confused with the man of the same name. Some of the mistakes are merely odd, like the "conventional regicide" or use of hot-air balloons to "lighten the ground", and one can amuse oneself by working out what they should have been. Others are misleading, as when *journaliers* become "journeymen" and war contractors "tradesmen", to cite two examples out of many more. Sometimes the translation is simply wrong: Augustin "de" Robespierre is said to have deprived Bonaparte of command of the artillery when he actually got him the job; Hoche is described as too old when he was too young. It is not clear whether the printer or the

another, the reader has a busy time and this is emphatically not a book that may be safely used by anyone without access to the original French text.

In so far as one can penetrate to Tulard's text, his biography provides a lively, if rather conventional survey of a period so complex as almost to defy compression within a single volume. The author is an acknowledged master of his subject and his encyclopedic knowledge allows him, time and again, to illuminate familiar events with judicious quotation from people who were there at the time. One of the most valuable parts of his book is the bibliographical commentary, on sources, secondary works and "open questions", attached to each chapter, where the full extent of his own expertise becomes awesomely apparent. It is not Tulard's fault if Napoleon himself remains as inscrutable as ever and the man remains hidden behind the perpetrator of events. What transformed the minor Corsican noble who shared his contemporaries' penchant for writing imitations of Rousseau, into the man who created an empire in his own image and led an army to Moscow, what happened to him and what it felt like to be Napoleon after having been Bonaparte, we shall perhaps never know. Tulard is neither an idolater nor a debunker. One senses that he is not very interested in Napoleon's *états d'âme* and is content to treat him as a kind of personified historical force.

If one takes the merits of his book—and they are many, at least in the French text—for granted, one may still take issue with his method, which is characteristic of a good deal of French historical writing. To present history as a developing consensus, rolling towards the solution of such "open questions" as have not yet been satisfactorily solved, conveys a misleading impression of the subject as akin to the physical sciences. There are more open questions than are dreamed of in Tulard's philosophy. His whole book rests on the assumption that the gains, they turned to Bonaparte.

When Napoleon abandoned them in pursuit of his imperial dreams, they deserted him and he fell. It may be so, but the explanation cannot be taken as self-evident and it needs much more substantiation than it gets.

Tulard's knowledge of the Revolution, in a sense peripheral to his subject, but also the foundation of his argument, is sketchy and looks old-fashioned to British or American eyes. The ubiquitous "bourgeois" are never defined. We are told that they are ungrateful and cowardly, which sounds more like inverted snobbery than dispassionate analysis. Although the explanation given for Napoleon's rise and fall is essentially economic, the actual description of the French economy seems tailored to fit a preconceived interpretation of events. Tulard tells us that, in 1794, the "bourgeoisie" had done well out of the revolution and "could look to the future with confidence". This is followed by a survey of France in 1799 which shows that much of the country, especially the Atlantic ports, which had been its most advanced economic sector, was virtually ruined. If a victorious bourgeoisie opted first for a military dictator and then put the

Bourbons back, so that it had to start its revolution all over again in 1830, it does not seem to have been very good at politics. In the same way, reading Tulard one is never quite sure whether the British economy was almost wrecked by the Continental System or too far ahead for French counter-measures to do it much serious harm. If the explanation of Napoleon's success and failure rests on an economic basis, this should have been demonstrated in detail instead of being more or less taken for granted.

Tulard himself, in his conclusion, suggests that political instability and the recurrence of various Bonapartist "saviours", from Cavaignac to de Gaulle, throughout modern French history, is due to "the disappearance of legitimacy on which the old monarchy was based before 1789". Once again, it may be so, but this explanation sits uneasily beside the economic determinism that has made the reading throughout the rest of the book. As an account of Napoleon's career, Tulard's biography is admirable. As an explanation, it leaves us more or less where we started.

## Short of the ready

### Malcolm Vale

HARRY A. MISKIMIN  
Money and Power in Fifteenth-Century France  
300pp. Yale University Press. £20.  
0300331327

It is perhaps a sign of our times that historians should seek "monetarist" explanations of political change. Harry A. Miskimin's interesting and provocative new book attempts to "clarify and bring to light a hitherto hidden dimension of money supply to the course of French political history." He divides his book into two distinct parts: 121 pages of text to 163 pages of statistical tables. Records of Mint production kept by the Valois monarchy between 1395 and 1495 form the major sources of his evidence. He is well aware of the dangers inherent in the use of this material, which is incomplete and often unrepresentative of more general movements of bullion, but he nevertheless sees fit to ground his argument upon "a somewhat crude juxtaposition of mint output levels against contemporary political circumstances and events." The result is a highly speculative, and necessarily selective, interpretation of the supposed impact of monetary movements and bullion scarcity upon the complex political and institutional developments of the period.

Two fundamental problems confront the reader: first, how can we be sure that the suggested relationship between monetary movements and certain political developments is anything more than a contrived juxtaposition, devoid of any causal connection? Second, does the evidence which is presented here actually endorse the claims made on its behalf? Miskimin's analysis rests upon a certain interpretation of political events, around which the monetary evidence is then marshalled. This interpretation is, as he himself admits, lacking in originality (Chapter One) and is largely based upon the works of historians such as Calmette, Petit-Dutaillis, Gandilhon, Doucet and Perroy, who were writing between 1920 and 1945. Much water has flowed under the bridges of later medieval French history since that time, and a more evident and fruitful use (outside the Bibliography) of writings by Guenée, Contamine, Leguall, Cazelles, Chevallier and Favre, to name but a few, would reassure the reader. As it is, some traditional clichés about the rise of "absolute" monarchy, the economic "policy" of Louis XI (1461-83) and the "diary" and exhausting Italian war are repeated as if they were proven facts. Monetary evidence thus enters the book in alliance with distinctly conservative, if not out-dated, interpretations of power-politics.

Professor Miskimin is a firm believer in the so-called "bullion famine" of the mid-fifteenth century. This belief tends to render his arguments more dogmatic than they need to be. The role of credit finance, loans and securities

(such as the seizure of Jacques Coeur's assets in 1453) in the underwriting of royal ambitions is largely ignored, because these aspects of the financial system were seldom reflected in the records of the Mint. Miskimin's methods and convictions sometimes force him into a self-contradictory position. At one point, he states that "the connection between elevated mint production and major military encounters has, in my opinion, been established beyond doubt" while, two pages previously, he speaks of "extremely low levels of mint production in France, Burgundy and England at a time of decidedly major military encounters." He also states that the recovery of Normandy and Gascony from the English (1449-53) and the Burgundian war with Ghent (1451-53). Clearly the thesis does not always work, and an increasing scepticism overcame this reviewer as he read on.

Political and institutional historians, especially those of representative assemblies, are gently scolded by Miskimin for their neglect of monetary factors. Yet if the monetary evidence is so treacherously difficult to interpret, they may surely be absolved of guilt on that score. Monetary mutations and attempts by rulers to increase or control bullion flow were often employed as means to political ends in the later Middle Ages. In this analysis, however, political ends become subservient to forms of economic thinking more characteristic of the twentieth than the fifteenth century. This book sometimes lacks a certain sense of proportion, and it suffers from a lack of historical perspective. The practices which Miskimin seems to regard as especially significant in the fifteenth century can be traced back at least as far as the reign of Philip the Fair (1285-1314) and, in one instance, to that of Philip III (1270-85). The "first true sumptuary law having force throughout France" was not, as Miskimin believes, promulgated in 1485: an *ordonnance* of 1279 represented the first attempt by the French crown to regulate the dress and possessions deemed appropriate to various ranks in society. The techniques of coinage debasement and control of bullion flow out of the kingdom (to Rome, Avignon or elsewhere), moreover, were well-known from the later thirteenth century onwards. Louis XI's pronouncements, when seen in that light, assume a markedly conservative air.

*Money and Power in Fifteenth-Century France* is illuminating and instructive on the subject of money, but its analysis of power seems somewhat flawed. Miskimin's tables are likely to be the most valuable part of his book, because they provide a mine of information for economic and numismatic historians. It is, incidentally, unfortunate that the dust-jacket illustration is mis-labelled. Quentin Matsy's Louvre panel of a pawnbroker's shop has become "A Banker and his Wife" (1512), while the altarpiece of a far more kind than that painted by the great banking house and royal financiers of the fifteenth century.

# From war to Welfare State

## John Burnett

JOHN STEVENSON  
British Society 1914-45  
503pp. Allen Lane. £16.95 (paperback),  
Penguin, £2.95.  
07139 13908

Survey history is a notoriously difficult art-form, especially for a period in which so much change was packed into little more than a generation. Here, within the space of thirty years, were ten years of "total" war, the new phenomena of mass unemployment and a Great Depression set against rising material standards and the emergence of a consumer society for the majority of the population, the accession of Labour to political power, a General Strike and, not least, a revolution in social policy which culminated in the creation of the modern Welfare State—all this and more in

one, admittedly hefty, volume of 500 pages, is a tall order.

One problem is how to accommodate the sheer mass of detailed fact which recent scholars have assembled on particular aspects of the period: another is to strike the right balance between fact and analysis, between telling the reader "what happened in history" and making some interpretative sense and judgment about the course and causes of change. And all this compounded by the difficulty of knowing for whom The Pelican Social History of Britain is intended. Traditionally, the non-fiction Penguin was aimed at "the intelligent layman", the non-specialist who wished to be informed interestingly but not over-exposed to pure scholarship: nowadays, one suspects, many of them are graduates or university students who expect a more academic treatment than the general reader.

On the whole, John Stevenson's book succeeds well, sometimes very well, in steering a

middle course between the two readerships. There are some excellent chapters, particularly those on the Home Front during the First World War, on living standards and unemployment between the wars, on the decline of religious observance and the growth of leisure and the media. In these, Stevenson has the advantage of his own previous researches, with Chris Cook, for their *Social Conditions in Britain between the Wars*: elsewhere, he draws adroitly on the work of many other scholars, condensing a vast array of data into palatable portions. There is scarcely a word or a sentence in this big book with which one would want to disagree. Sometimes there may be rather too much detail for "the intelligent layman", while for students it is regrettable that the format precluded the use of footnotes or references, other than a slightly slender note on "Further Reading".

That said—and one could cite many examples of the well-chosen phrase, the curious statistic and the apt quotation—there are a few debts to be set against the credits. In a book so crowded with facts there must be some errors of commission or, at least, distortions arising from compression. It is incorrect, for example, to write that "one and a half million families . . . were rehoused by slum clearance in the inter-war years": there were one and a half million state-aided houses built between the wars, but only a small minority of these were for slum clearance, the great majority being for "general needs". A different example: in summarizing John Boyd Orr's *Food, Health and Income* Stevenson concludes that "only . . . a third of the population enjoyed a diet which met Orr's stringent requirements". What he does not say is that Boyd Orr, uniquely among the social investigators of the day, was applying an optimum standard of nutrition "such that no improvement can be effected by a change in the diet".

Specialists in other areas will, no doubt, quibble with other over-simplifications. Equally, they will point to what they regard as errors of omission, inevitable in a book which attempts so much. Why so scanty a reference to the Liberal social reforms and the rise of the Labour Party in Chapter One ("Britain in 1914")? Why, in the section on Birth Control, is there no mention of the Olive Banks argument that the official feminist movement discouraged publicity for artificial contraception because the popular mind associated it with extra-marital sex? And is it right to give so little space to the General Strike on the ground that "the strike is more a matter of concern for political history than a social one"?

These are relatively small points. It is over questions of balance and emphasis that one may have larger doubts. The social history of the First World War is covered excellently and thoroughly in two chapters of fifty-six pages, the Second World War, longer, more "total" in its involvement of the whole population and more directly significant in its effects on contemporary society, receives only seventeen pages, six of which are devoted to the Beveridge Plan. And the last short chapter, "Conclusion", is really a summary rather than an analysis and synthesis of the course and causes of change. Here was the opportunity to offer some interpretations, either new or second-hand, of the growth of mass culture, the determinants of social policy, the survival of a cohesive society over a period characterized by crises. It is almost as though by the Second World War Stevenson had had enough of his book, or his publishers had become alarmed at its length, and so we are left without a proper finale and a little short on ideas. A pity, because this marks an otherwise remarkable book which will both interest the general reader and will be widely read and quoted to us by students.

## Below the poverty-line

### Theodora C. Cooper

A. W. DILNOT, J. A. KAY and C. N. MORRIS  
The Reform of Social Security  
166pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £10  
(paperback, £3.95).  
019772262

This book, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, is a clear and forceful argument for the replacement of almost all of the present British social security system by a variant of a social dividend scheme. The scheme was welcomed enthusiastically and mainly uncritically by the national press immediately on publication.

There is a lively account of the development of social security in Britain since the Beveridge Report, and an assessment of problems with the present system. The authors are not in favour of the complex and expensive administration, large numbers with incomes below Supplementary Benefit level mainly because they do not take up means-tested benefits to which they are entitled. A. W. Dilnot, J. A. Kay and C. N. Morris argue that a structure based on universal (non-means-tested) benefits and the principle of social insurance could not succeed as Beveridge hoped, for two main reasons. First, it would be impossible to identify in advance of decades of economic and social change all the distinct contingencies that might be significant causes of poverty, and provide insurance against them. Second, there has not been a political willingness to have taxes and contributions at the level that would be necessary to bring nearly everybody, by universal benefits, above the relative poverty standard which has, by overwhelming consensus (approved by these authors) lain behind the Supplementary Benefits structure.

Dilnot, Kay and Morris outline a single administrative structure that could handle both the assessment of personal tax liabilities and entitlement to most benefits, including means-tested housing benefits. This change should nearly eliminate the take-up problem, and reduce hostility to means-tested benefits. The structure they have designed is far more flexible than that proposed in 1972 for the tax credit scheme. Using data from the Family Expenditure Survey they show how, with this structure, a close approximation to the present pattern of redistribution could be produced. The poverty trap is doled up, so that no one could face a marginal tax and withdrawal rate as high as 100 per cent, though more than at present would face rates above 80 per cent.

Major distributive changes are then advocated. Mainly by changing flat-rate pensions and child benefits from universal to means-tested benefits about £10 billion could be saved. The authors would want to use about half of this sum to raise benefits and thus reduce by about 900,000 the number of families with incomes below 120 per cent of Supplementary Benefit. They would want to use the other half to reduce income tax.

The authors' assessment of the present system, and of the one they advocate, is governed by a single criterion: effectiveness in relieving poverty. The authors' assessment of the present system, and of the one they advocate, is governed by a single criterion: effectiveness in relieving poverty.

mean income levels of family units lower than the Supplementary Benefits standard.) Concentration on one sole objective aids clarity and rhetorical effectiveness. They argue convincingly that the prevention of poverty is and should be the principle aim of social security. More controversially, they write as if they believe that should be its only aim. Other aims which have concerned advocates and designers of social security programmes are either dismissed with the assertion that they are of less priority than pure poverty relief (and the implication that this means that they should not be pursued at all), or are caricatured.

The view that parents' obligation to support their children affects their fair net contribution to, or receipt from, the tax and transfer system whatever their income does not appeal to the authors because parents have chosen to have social pleasure in their children. Nor do they accept that the state should, by provision of a pension scheme with benefits that are not withdrawn from those above a standard assistance level, help citizens to enjoy a standard of living in retirement near to that which they would have chosen if they had been able to allocate their lifetime incomes over their life cycle in an optimal way. Many will fail to attain such a standard of living in the absence of a state scheme, some because of myopia, some because of inadequacies of private sector institutions, such as pension schemes that make poor provision for job changers and provide pensions that fall rapidly in value in times of inflation. They also ignore the problem of child poverty caused by unsatisfactory distribution of income within the family, the risk of which is reduced by paying child benefit to the parent who is both more likely to be responsible for purchases to meet the child's urgent needs and more likely to have insufficient money. They advocate payment of this benefit to the earning parent(s), on the grounds that "distribution of income between husband and wife is a matter for them rather than the Government".

It is not certain that if the social security system was reorganized as they advocate, and concentrated on the single objective of poverty relief, political willingness to raise the living standards of the poorest by increasing these "efficient" benefits would be much greater. It might be, as the authors believe. On the other hand, in several European countries there has been political willingness to spend a higher proportion of national product than ours on a social security system considerably less "efficient" than ours by the criterion of poverty relief—perhaps because other aims have been valued more highly.

The book is an interesting and important contribution to the debate on social security reform. Many of its suggestions will meet with approval even from those who disagree with the authors' view that those families with children and pensioners safely above the poverty line should get less than they do now in order that not only people below or near that line, but also comparatively well-off childless working adults, should get more, and who think it absurd to describe this as a view about the "efficiency" of the social security system.

## Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels



Published by: Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the CC of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the CC of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany

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THE BODLEY HEAD



# The dance of discontent

Douglas Dunn

IAN CRICHTON SMITH

*The Exiles*  
57pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £4.95.  
0856354953

JOHN MONTAGUE

*The Dead Kingdom*  
96pp. Oxford University Press. £4.95.  
0192119613

Over the years, Iain Crichton Smith's poetry has increased in strangeness and beauty. He is a poet of his own discontents, but one who has submitted his unrest to the demands of the imagination.

In the spring, air returns to us wide, with a sense of windows and our ruinous virtues sparkle once more like old cans in a ditch.

Those old cans seem familiar from George Mackay Brown's poetry, but "wide, with a sense of windows" sings with the spacious lyricism that is the signature on Smith's best writing, just as "ruinous" carries a typical hint of chagrin.

Peter Levi - I think it was he - once remarked that "development" is a notion best left to describe the progress of minor talents, and that "growth" is a more apt description for the work of better poets. Certainly, each of Smith's books takes his work further, always with an unexpectedness or newness that seems an increase over previous writing in a more rounded sense than mere piecemeal augmentation of theme and style. The surprise and authority of these lines from "Always" are different, but not entirely so, from anything he has done before:

the late evening skies are lost sails  
beyond all feeling's mercy, beyond lights  
trembling and yellow of the unknown wake.

poetry of the limits of intuition and imagining. The second of the three "Snow Poems" is an apparently effortless art of wintry, elegiac and gentle speaking. Snow is a "spectral friend", the "water changer",

and therefore to the magic world akin here now then gone without the grief of longing leaving no will behind it in the rain,

and not so human as the breath of roses, beyond regret or joy, what simply is, and then what simply was, and may return, but not a growth that is inevitable, more like a simple visitor or guest who has left the house before the rest awake.

"Half of this world I am, half of this dooming", Smith writes in his "For Poeta Writing in English Over in Ireland". The acknowledgment connects Smith's Gaelic Scotland with the old and new Irelands of John Montague's poetry. Exile is a subject of both books, but where Smith's handling of the theme is general, and, perhaps, idealized, Montague's is drawn from an exact interaction of his family's history with the emergencies of Irish emigration. One recognizes the qualitative difference between Smith's sentiments, in, for example, the two poems called "Returning Exile", and those of "The Canadian Boat Song" (lovely as that old poem is). Yet his poems of exile suffer from a lack of focus or detail, and the suggestion to make here might be that an essentially lyric gift hazards too much when it encounters subjects whose implications are historical and social.

That talent for organization and the placing of parts which distinguished *The Rough Field* again underlies the success and interest of Montague's *The Dead Kingdom*. Compared to Smith's more intuitive poetry, Montague's skill in the making and adjustment of sequences might seem a shade too deliberate. One kind of poet precedes books and sequences with epigraphs, another recoils from the practice. Considered free of their sophisticated setting, Montague's poems are ample and

his father, relatives, childhood, the Troubles, places, mythology and ancient history are juxtaposed within five titled sequences and played off one against the other.

At times, the book seems intended to contrast an affectionate elegy for his parents with a bitter and reluctant mourning of the matter of Ireland. Intimate and public sorrows, private grief and public calamity, encourage an uncomfortable medley of feelings in a reading of *The Dead Kingdom*. The death of the mother seems a larger than personal loss, while the proximity of "Northern Express" (a description of an incident from Ireland's contemporary violence) to "Gravity", "Intimacy", "A Muddy Cup" and other personal poems is surely a deliberate play.

Where Montague's design fails is in those poems that inflate the feeling of the book as a whole rather than serve it. "Invocation to the Guardian" and "Deities" introduce an overblown faith in mystique and antiquity. It is almost as if they represent an effort to graft on the loftiness that the plainer idiom of the rest of

## Angel of the apocalypse

Peter Redgrove

HENRY MILLER

*The Time of the Assassins: A study of Rimbaud*  
163pp. Quartet. £7.95.  
0704324768

This book seems to have been curiously subverted. Henry Miller wrote it near the time of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the whole world seemed to him firmly in the grasp of the anti-poets, who wanted to die because they had never lived. Anthony Burgess, introducing this re-issue in 1984, updates the prospect of annihilation, saying that Miller "is using Rimbaud prophetically to deliver his own judgments on the collapse of the Western civilisation in the twentieth century". Though his temper that this is a doomsday essay: "Through Rimbaud, Miller delivers his apocalyptic judgments of the world."

Miller's essay is loaded rhetorical and rambling and sometimes difficult to pin down, but the message often comes through clear and strong as at least potentially positive. Rimbaud is "the Columbus of Youth... the one who extended the boundaries of that only partially explored domain... since from the beginning of history man has never enjoyed the full measure of youth nor known the limitless possibilities of adulthood. How can one... if one's energies are consumed in combatting the errors and fallacies of parents and ancestors... the false maturity of the civilised man...?"

The subversion is comically compounded by Miller himself. When I first read the essay in the *New Directions Annual*, Volumes Nine and Eleven, the two parts seemed exciting, important and vital, the first appearing more so than

the book resists. Not so, perhaps, the two other poems related to them, the panoptic "What a View", a more realistic soaring of imagination, and "The Well Dreams", which sets off the hidden laughter of earth and the nature of Ireland free of history and inhabitants.

Even a public disturbs that tremor laden meniscus, that implicit shivering. They sink towards the floor, the basement of quiet, settle into a small mosaic.

Without the contemporary hyperbole of "Deities", *The Dead Kingdom* would be wonderfully unified, its narrative movement, its marriage of public and private realms, of cause and blessing, little short of tremendous. I doubt if Montague has ever been so controlled and touching as he is here in such poems as "The Music Box", "Family Conference" and "The Locket". Melody and imagery may have been sacrificed to narrative and feeling, but Montague's art in *The Dead Kingdom* is to make us not miss them.

the second. Unfortunately they are now reprinted (as they were in the New Directions American edition), in the reverse order, which makes a considerable difference, as it gives the doubts of the middle-aged writer precedence over the energies of Rimbaud's strange, enigmatic enigma. The cunning and power in the essay for me lies almost entirely in Miller's amazement over the youthful genius, which provokes him to male-menopausal despair: how could such a poet play thus fast and loose with his angelhood? Miller wrote "In Rimbaud, I see myself as in a mirror". But printed the original way round, with Rimbaud the reality and Miller the reflector, we glimpse the poet's revelation before we are overwhelmed by the novelist's sense of doom.

Miller says that Rimbaud is "like a saint in his knowledge and experience of sin". Miller could have opened Rimbaud to the contemporary punk spirit of youth of which the Frenchman ("in nothing was he more as French than in his youthfulness") must be the more original, by putting the poet first. He could also have printed literal translations of the French so that the book, to anyone unfamiliar with the language, didn't look like a posh restaurant menu advertising unfamiliar foods. Anthony Burgess is uncharacteristically unhelpful by remarking that "Miller was not the brightest man who ever lived", and this puts a finishing touch to the series of depressions.

The augum remains; it is still a disaster when one like Rimbaud, or for that matter, Sylvia Plath, stops giving us what we need, for any reason; and it is true that the world finds it difficult to accede to the simplest of Rimbaudian propositions, "I am another... who can blame the wood that awakes as a violin?" That already has the ring of a video lyric, but "Ce n'est pas le rêve d'un hochschol, c'est le rêve d'un voyant."

## The Earthquake

The jacket of her chalk-stripe suit  
over a straight-backed chair,

her tie's navy-blue  
rope-burn.

A cymbal-hiss  
from her eight-year-old's drum-kit?

A goose saying Boo  
to some great event?

One delicately-tufted lynx's ear,  
the fibre-optics

of her hair.  
Slowly last night comes back to him

The hacienda's frump  
of pampas-grass,

a pair of cryptic  
eagles guarding its front door.

Her arm goes out to check for rain -  
a shoulder-bruise

as from a rifle-butt -  
and finds Radio Eireanni.

Ireland has moved; they haven't.

PAUL MULDOON

# Scottish Renaissance man

James Campbell

ALAN BOLD (Editor)

*The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*  
910pp. Hamish Hamilton. £20.  
0241112206  
*The Thistle Rises: A MacDiarmid miscellany*  
463pp. Hamish Hamilton. £12.95.  
0241111714

"My task is to be unpopular", wrote Hugh MacDiarmid to the Scottish Nationalist leader R. H. Muirhead in 1928, "a fighter - an enemy of accepted things." Until his death fifty years later, at the age of eighty-six, he lived up to his commitment, to the extent of using himself as his own target: "There is much in Hugh MacDiarmid's long poem *To Circumjack Cencras* which most people will deplore", he wrote under a pseudonym in 1930, "and a great deal, surely, that no one can justify."

The motive was not entirely perverse self-aggrandizement (though MacDiarmid was never short of that, in any form) but was part of a campaign to drag Scottish letters and affairs into the twentieth century. This struggle is inseparable from his actual poetic achievement; while MacDiarmid's propagandizing antics frequently inspired him to great feats of creativity, their intensity was often in danger of damaging the product. The description of him in 1953 as "the best poet in Scotland today... and also the worst" was well placed (and not one he disagreed with). As he put it to George Bruce that same year, his job was "to erupt like a volcano, emitting not only flame, but a lot of rubbish".

The purpose, basically, was to overwhelm by any means possible the kind of art with which Scotland was left while modernism took off in the rest of Europe. Not untypical of vernacular poetry at the turn of the century was David Rorie's "The Pawky Duke":

There since was a very pawky duke  
Who owned a house with a grand outlook.  
A garden an' a rockery.  
Hech meel The pawky duke!

Against this, MacDiarmid set articles and poems with titles such as "Modern Scottish Culture in the light of Dialectical Materialism", "Burns and Baudelaire", "In Memoriam James Joyce", drew up plans for a "Scottish Vortex" and formulated a Scottish aesthetic.

Alan Bold's huge edition of letters reveals the kind of energy with which MacDiarmid fulfilled his task. Writing to his former teacher, George Ogilvie, in 1916, he outlines a series of "Scotts Art Essays"; and in the week of his death in 1978 we find him planning a long article on the novelist Fionn MacColla, which is to be "one of the best things I've done". In between, he published approximately eighty books and pamphlets, and seems to have abandoned at least that many again. "I'm tackling a huge survey of the whole field of Scottish personality throughout the ages", he told Helen Cruikshank in 1940. "And besides that... a history of Scottish doctors and doctoring, a book on the Faroe Islands and a biography of John Maclean." A footnote mentions that none of these books materialized, a lament which recurs often.

Partly as a result of this reforming zeal, it is Hugh MacDiarmid the poet (and fighter) who



Bold has arranged the letters by correspondent, rather than chronology, which gives the scheme a certain neatness, allowing us to watch the development of the poet's relationships, but which also causes repetition - like most letter-writers, MacDiarmid wrote the same thing over and over again. The footnotes are informative and use index useful, although there are some curious omissions, such as the numerous references to the *TLS*, the text (including many letters) to the *TLS*, with which he had a typically affectionate and aggressive relationship lasting half a century.

More than fifty recipients are listed, including, in addition to those already mentioned, Neil Gunn, Compton Mackenzie, Naomi Mitchison, Sorley Maclean, Sean O'Casey and two of his many publishers. A single letter to Ezra Pound is a disappointment, but there is an interesting correspondence with T. S. Eliot. *In Memoriam James Joyce*, Eliot published in 1956; but could not persuade Faber and Criterion but could not persuade Faber and Criterion to take on the longer work, in spite of his own appreciation of it as "a magnificent tribute to language... an astonishing piece of work". MacDiarmid remained grateful for the "chilly encouragement" (Eliot's phrase), however, and afterwards would wheel in Eliot in his own support when defending himself against detractors.

Yet, as an interview in *The Thistle Rises* reveals, he was not above putting him down in order to make a show. The same goes down in order to make a show. The same goes down in order to make a show. The same goes down in order to make a show.

## Critical conditions

Andrew Wright

ANNE WRIGHT

*Literature of Crisis, 1910-22: Howards End, Heartbreak House, Women in Love and The Waste Land*  
236pp. Macmillan. £20.  
0333275179

Anne Wright has acquainted herself with a number of recent works of literary theory, and brings new insights to the works treated here. Bradbury, Eagleton, Fussell, Kermode and others make a contribution to *Literature of Crisis, 1910-22*. Scholarly assiduity plays a welcome role as well; the manuscript sources have been consulted; the most authoritative texts have been employed; and the ex-

cessive readings offer considerable help in understanding the four works under scrutiny.

But it must be said that the author has set herself a task of formidable scope, or perhaps lack of scope. There is a certain difficulty about the actual period chosen: as Wright says in the final chapter, the sense of crisis before, during, and after the First World War can be seen in a larger context; it is difficult to draw the line. Moreover, the four works do not exhaust the possibilities of illustration; and she herself goes beyond the boundaries of her subtitle, to a number of other works that bear on her thesis, from *Tono Bungoy* to *Poem Counter Poem*. Nor is the mixture of genres dealt with altogether satisfactory: this defect, readily acknowledged by Wright, makes the argument about what nowadays is called elegy somewhat difficult to sort out. In addition,

but also irresponsible and even treacherous. "I do not attach the slightest importance to his work", he wrote to Neil Gunn of Compton Mackenzie, while apparently reading the latter's books (so he told him) "with very great interest, admiration... and sheer joy". When Lewis Grassic Gibbon, his collaborator and ally in the Scottish Renaissance, fell foul of the sales manager at Routledge, MacDiarmid aimed his sympathy where his own position was most likely to be strengthened as a result, kicking Gibbon in the teeth for the salesman's pleasure. (It didn't work, and in a series of which he was general editor the only title not to appear was his own.)

In the famous case of Edwin Muir, the letters show how violent his feeling against the author of *Scott and Scotland* actually was. In that book, Muir - until then another supporter of the Renaissance - expressed doubts about MacDiarmid's use of synthetic Scots and suggested that "a Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice but to absorb the English tradition", arguing that the literary tradition in Scotland had reached an end. As if the thesis itself were not treacherous enough, Muir used the Routledge series to present it. (No letters to Muir are included here, although there must surely have been some.) MacDiarmid ranted to his correspondents of Muir's "pretensions to creative artistry" and about being "disgusted" by his critical writings. The deeper the wound, the louder MacDiarmid protested that he hadn't been hit. In this case, his resentment may have been intensified by the fear that Muir could be right; thirty-five years after the quarrel began, in 1970, he wrote: "So far as a very large part of our own population is concerned the process of Anglicisation has gone so far that they are just utterly hopeless."

The "Reply to Edwin Muir" included in *The Thistle Rises* (actually snipped from the introduction to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*) is less a reply to Muir than an exercise well as a selection of his best poems). Although he possessed a wide-ranging, acrobatic, relentless investigative intelligence, he was also a reckless thinker, horroing the ideas of others and permitting personal grudges to cloud his critical faculty. His opposition to "accepted things", attractive though it often is, appears in less amusing when it comes down to this, in 1940: "If the French and British bourgeoisie win [against Hitler] it will be infinitely more difficult to get rid of them later"; or when it comes to rejoining the Communist Party after Hungary in 1956; or blaming Jews for economic ill; or asking "What matters? who we kill? To lessen that foulest murder that deprives / Maist men o' real lives?"

There is plenty more. The virtue of this collection of letters is that the poet, the revolutionary, and occasionally the man, line up side-by-side, so that, as well as being shown his heroism in a new context, we can also see the posturing of one page punctured on the next. There are (rare) moments of self-doubt: "I have written far too much", he admitted in 1970; but his achievement will be judged finally not only by his own literary work but, perhaps equally important, by what he has made possible.

there is the question of the possible readership for this study: is it intended for pupils who need to be reminded of the most celebrated lines of *Richard II*, or is it for advanced university students and such general readers as may like to link plot-making to the Apocalypse?

In some ways this study may be too ambitious. Other secondary sources might have been consulted: the argument about *Howards End*, centring on a shift from the realistic to the symbolic mode, would have been enriched by examination of *Aspects of the Novel* and P. N. Furbank's biography of Forster; and of the many commentaries on *Women in Love* and *The Waste Land*. Anna Wright has, no doubt wisely, chosen to eschew all but a handful; but it is more than merely disadvantageous not to have employed such sources as Leavis, or Lawrence and Helen Gardner on T. S. Eliot.

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**PIER PAOLO PASOLINI**  
**Selected Poems**  
 Translated by Norman MacAfee with  
 Luciano Martinengo  
 231pp. Calder. Paperback, £6.95.  
 0714538892

Addressing the crowd of 10,000 gathered in the Campo de' Fiori in Rome for the public funeral of Pasolini, Alberto Moravia began by speaking of being haunted by images of Pasolini's murder and of tentatively searching these images for a meaning: "Ho capito che chi fuggiva a piedi dal suo carnefice era un poeta"; he compared the fleeing figure of the poet to Italy in what he saw as its heseat condition. A similar connection, between Pasolini's career and recent Italian history, is made by his biographer, Enzo Siciliano, in an illuminating introduction to this *Selected Poems*. Born in 1922, the year of Mussolini's march on Rome, Pasolini was the poet of the transition from a Fascist to a democratic spirit; the poet of the demise of those democratic ideals, swept aside by the consumer society, by that mass levelling which, in his political journalism written in the early seventies, just before his death, he called "anthropological genocide".

Though Siciliano speaks justifiably of Pasolini's career as a "destiny", it is, as he remarks, a baffling destiny. "and many questions arise".

Nearly ten years afterwards the images of the murder remain unforgiving and make it painful to confront the poetry. Whatever the truth of the event, Pasolini's death was clearly not an unhappy freak but a horribly ept consequence, foretold in detail by himself, of the act of absolute opposition which his life and work together represent. He said of his poems, "What strikes me is the realization of how inextricably they are entwined with which I

there is a good deal of bravado and strident self-dramatization - or so it could seem while he was alive. But it is impossible now to take statements like the one just quoted as other than completely literal. His death is the guarantee of his sincerity and an indication of the risk involved in his diverse achievement.

The great strength of Pasolini's poetry is its openness, the desire "to have / to the world before my eyes and not / just in my heart". Writing often in a loose *terza rima* which derives from Dante, he broke with the hermetic lyric tradition to produce a civil poetry (innovatory in Italian because it is of the Left), exploring in his own "obscure scandal of consciousness" the difficulties of post-war Italy. At its best, in for example "The Ashes of Gramsci", he combines liveliness and gravity, the apprehension of a general predicament with beautifully observed and lived specifics. The world of his poetry is chiefly that of the Roman suburbs and a population of first or second-generation city-dwellers, still living by the values of the countryside from which they came. Pasolini celebrates an ideal of archaic ingenuousness belonging to an immemorial *civiltà contadina*. The ideal originated in his memories of his own youth, largely spent in the north Italian region of Friuli, in whose dialect his earliest poems were written. The cityscapes of his poems are often interrupted by his recollection of "footpaths the shepherd / unknowingly fills to the brim with his youth".

Pasolini managed the poise of "The Ashes of  
 Gramsci" only rarely. His work is character-  
 ized by "A Desperate Vitality" – the title of  
 one of his most technically interesting poems.  
 The stress is as much on the desperation as the  
 vitality. Pasolini has the restlessness and haste  
 of the protagonists in many of his films or of the  
 hordes ofurchins who often run shrieking in  
 their wake. In his poetry, he is not at rest within  
 the language and often gives the impression

feeling of sexual promise and distraction, and there are many glimpses of the boys, "always nearer the enchantment of the species / the norm that makes of sons tender fathers", whom he sought out as partners. The confusions recorded in the poetry resolve themselves elsewhere – and then symbolically or by pretext – in the temporary clarity of sex.

These encounters are partly a defiant assertion of his "difference", but they mean much more. What moves Pasolini and what he has in teach - his didactic intention requires the body as well as the mind to lie open to it - is a sense of historical and mythical continuity, experienced with carnal immediacy. His Mediterranean world is an ancient one, but its unnceness is continually made new in the young body, according to a knowledge involuntarily absorbed generation by generation. "Ah, mitichissima gioventù" is the central exclamation of his poetry. The horror in his lute political essays, which can be read back into the poetry, is that this inward continuity - bricly unchced by Fascism - was now being destroyed.

This attractively produced volume contains just under half the work which Pasolini included in a selection prepared in 1970. The Italian text is given opposite the translations. His writing is too rawly outgoing and of the moment to exist easily in English. But despite occasional awkwardness these versions are faithfully and thoughtfully done, and always readable. We need more of Pasolini's poetry in English, less for any self-sufficient literary pleasure which it offers than because it is important to understand what he is saying.

*The Scent of India* (96pp. The Olive Press, Paperback £4.95, 0 946889 02 3) is a translation by David Price of Pier Paolo Pasolini's account of a visit to India, which was published in Italy as *L'Odore dell'India* in 1974. Pasolini's journey which was made in the company of Alberto Moravia and Elsa Morante in 1961 is chronicled, in a series of impressions, feelings and perceptions, in a style which is both lyrical and poetic. The book is a valuable addition to the literature of India.

# Playing the displaced

**UMBERTO ECO**  
Sette anni di desideria: Cronache 1977-1983  
304pp. Milan: Bompiani, L. 16.000.

Umberto Eco is best known outside Italy for his aesthetic and semiological writings, and for his recent, best-selling, *Il nome della rosa*, but he is also a tireless anatomist of current manners and modes, of shifts in collective sensibility. Semiology, as in the case of Roland Barthes, provides Eco with a method and a pretext for tackling almost anything. Over a wide field, he elaborates definitions and distinctions with good-humoured verve and old-fashioned precision, qualities which are particularly evident in *Sette anni di desolatio*, a collection of articles which covers the highly irrational period between 1977 and 1983: the years of the Red Brigades, of innumerable political kidnappings and assassinations, and of a massive student revolt.

The leitmotif of Eco's book, as indicated in the title, is "desire". His thesis is that, for a variety of reasons, belief in technical progress and belief in salvation by revolution both collapsed in the 1970s. This collapse left the "subject", both collective and individual, face to face with its own oaked "desire"; such desire, which is infinite, is thus no longer moderated or channelled by society and its traditional secular and religious ideologies; it must therefore be newly projected and undergo various uncontrolled displacements and sublimations. Among other things, Eco tells us, this can lead to a rediscovery of the "sacred"; and there fore have the recent religious revival, attested, too, adds Eco, by the success of the Pope and by recent Superman films (or it can lead to a sort of Godless mysticism, to a "religiosity of the centre," or "a cult of the vortex, of the absence of otherness, of fracture . . .").

Such unsocialized "desire" can also lead to collective messianic and suicide trips, such as that led, in the jungles of Guyana, by the Reverend Jim Jones. Eco shows that this particular form of folly has a long genealogy, and a set of clear and repeatable mechanisms. Socratic hysteria and endless discussions of sport replace political belief and political discourse; dirty jokes replace sax and tenderness; a fascination with the tawdry occult replaces ritual and mysticism. Deprived of its proper objects, "desire" displaces itself towards their parody or shadow. If it is frustrated in too evident a fashion, it becomes, says Eco, naked snarl, leading to terrorism, and other forms of counter-productive and ominently unpolitical behaviour: thus the Rod Brigades.

Whom "desire gives itself a voice", as in the case of Radio Alice, a revolutionary radio station in Bologna in 1977. It uses, observes Eco, the language of the historical avant-garde: the angry young masses, the "Autonomists" and "Metropolitan Indians", spoke in effect with the voice "of the divided self, of consciousness in dissolution, of the transcendental ego in disintegration."

Eco was one of the few to turn a cool eye on the phenomenon, and was widely denounced for this by his fellow intellectuals. He was, they claimed, giving comfort to the terrorists and the "Indians" by bothering to analyse their motives and styles. As universities and schools, in the spring of 1977, disintegrated into endless assemblies, as anarchy ruled, and professors retreated in panic, Eco defined a new entity - the "desiring" or "libidinal" assembly, and distinguished it, with admirable Aristotelian clarity, from the "judicial assembly" and the "collaborative assembly". Such cool method and sense of humour rendered courage.

Many other subjects are treated in this collection: the objectivity of the media, the nature of "power", the "crisis of reason". Almost all revolve around themes raised by the revolt of '67 and by the evanescent concept of "development". Eco's ideas are, as usual, very suggestive; he is almost always successful in giving intellectual form to the ephemeral and chaotic contents of seven crucial years. His command of native taxonomy is the sign of a civilized and serene mind.

## An island and its towers

**E. ATZENI and others**  
**Ichneusa: La Sardegna dalle origini all'età**  
**classica**  
691pp. Milan: Scheiwiller.  
**M. S. BALMUTH and R. J. ROWLAND, Jr**  
**(Editors)**  
**Studies in Sardinian Archaeology**  
300pp. University of Michigan Press.  
0472.10047 5  
**G. LILLIU**  
**La civiltà nuragica**  
238pp. Sassari: Carlo Delfino.

The authors of the relevant chapter in the *Cambridge Ancient History* define Sardinia's best known and most characteristic type of field monument as "great stone towers looking from the distance like monumental versions of the sandcastle made by tipping out the contents of children's buckets". This is as good a description as any of the *nuraghi*, of which about seven thousand more or less extant specimens (as against four hundred superficially similar brochs in Scotland) ensure that archaeology plays an important part in the landscape, life and culture of the second largest island in the Mediterranean. Sardinian archaeology does not begin with the *nuraghi*, however, and the spectacular pre-*nuragic* discoveries of recent years have provided a series of major new factors in Mediterranean prehistory as a whole, as well as an increasingly capacious indigenous matrix for the succeeding non-literate and non-urban "civiltà nuragica" itself. In their very different ways, these three books should enable both specialists and travellers to appreciate the remarkable advances that are currently being made towards a better understanding of a unique but still relatively unfamiliar heritage.

*Ichneusa*, an unusually beautiful hook, was originally produced for the "Antica Madre" collection edited by G. Buijssse. *Comatella* is a complementary treatment of the same theme. The consilio bank; those concerned are to be consilium on the decision to release it now for commercial distribution. All of its lengthy chapters are contributed by the scholars most nearly concerned with the matters in hand. They include the doyen of Sardinian studies,

They include the *Boy of Lilliput*, Giovanni Lillipù, on nuragic bronzes and statuary and later on the place of Sardinia's past in modern historiography; two of his colleagues at the University of Cagliari, the distinguished prehistorians Enrico Atzeni and Maria Luisa Ferrarese Ceruti; and no fewer than four past and present Superintendents of Antiquities in Cagliari and Sassari, whose wise administration over the past two decades has created circumstances uniquely conducive to progress — Ercole Conchi on nuragic architecture; Fulvia Lo Schiavo, breaking new ground on nuragic economy and society; Farruccio Barreca on Sardinia and the Phoenicians; and Francesco Nicola on the evidence of tradition and archaeology for Sardinia's relations with the Classical world. Non-Italian readers should most certainly not be discouraged by the book's size, for it is more than normally true that they can look at the pictures: over 750 magnificent and informative ones, carefully selected and superbly printed in colour, as well as numerous good plans, and line drawings.

In sharp physical contrast, *Studies in Sardinian Archaeology* was manufactured from camera-ready copy provided by the editor, who reports that computer-assisted technology was chiefly responsible for the delay in production. Most of the studies were originally prepared for the Tufts University Colloquia in Sardinian archaeology founded by Miriam B. Smith, held annually since 1979 and still the only forum for ancient Sardinian affairs in the English-speaking world. The resulting volume is the first treatment of Sardinian archaeology to be published in English since the appearance of Margaret Guidi's *Sardinia* in 1963. It begins with David Trump's Neolithic prologue and ends with essays by Carlo Tronchetti, Roberto Zuccato, and other scholars and country

Robert Rowland on the cities and country of Roman Sardinia, described more briefly *Ichnusa* by Eugénia Equini Schneider. In between, there are useful technical papers on Italian hydration dating and on copper-bronze metallurgy by J. W. Michels, R. Tylecote, M. J. Becker and others.

The *nuraghi* themselves are introduced by Miriam Balmuth, who directed the first American excavation in Sardinia; her legendary enthusiasm for her subject is happily undimmed by the discovery that her hoped-for nuragic bronze foundry at Ortu Comidu was really a Carthaginian baker's oven. Frank Cross's classic papers on the vital Phoenician inscriptions from Nora are reprinted; and the archaeological evidence for Greek interest in the island is contrasted with the literary testimonia by Jean Davison. She remarks that "Ichnussa", the Greek name for Sardinia, might not mean "a man's footstep", to which Pausanias compared Sardinia's shape, but rather "stepping-stone", in view of the island's significance as a way-station on early trade routes. It is easy to say that this engaging etymology owes too much to archaeological hindsight, but it remains true that Pausanias had not seen Sardinia from the air – and that neither footprints nor stepping-stones should be overlooked by Mediterranean archaeologists. Finally, Peter J. Brown's preliminary examination of the evidence for malaria in the nuragic and later periods heralds some promising improvements in the evaluation of ecological factors and their effect on ancient Sardinian culture and economy.

Giovanni Lilliu's new account of *La civiltà nuragica* is a typically incisive and well-illustrated synthesis, important not only in itself but also as the first item in a fine archaeological list announced by an enterprising publisher. Carlo Delfino Editore of Sassari, and directed by Alberto Moravetti (whose own excavation of the nuragic village of Palmavera near Alghero is a model of what such things should be). Their plans include not only such syntheses like Lilliu's but also smaller guides and itineraries to individual sites and areas (such as Angeli Ru, Monte d'Accoddi and the Gallura); while G. Pinza's seminal *Monumenti primitivi della Sardegna* (1901) and two handsome volumes of A. Taramelli's vast output of Sardinian antiquities (1907 and 1911) have already appeared. This new series, which a programme owes its existence to what Italians often, and accurately, call "sensibilità culturale", a laudable quality applied to the past by publishers and public in Sardinia to an extent unsurpassed and rarely equalled elsewhere in Europe.

The scale of the new developments at the pre-nuragic end of the time-scale is seen at once in Atzeni's authoritative treatment of the Neolithic in *Ichnussa*. Of the 212 dots on his distribution map, just over 10 per cent indicate cultures earlier than any recognized in Sardinia in 1963. They are more or less equally divided between Early and Middle Neolithic, which are designated respectively to the sixth, fifth and fourth millennia ac. To these must be added the Lower Palaeolithic stone industries represented at six sites identified in 1979 in the Sassarese, which take the story of human activity in the island back to three or four hundred millennia from the present day – and in doing so raise the considerable problem of the Sardinian Middle and Upper Palaeolithic, which are too far attested, and of the Mesolithic. Atzeni sees possible traces of the latter in the blades of obsidian from Monte Arci, a prime source near Oristano, that have been found in pre-Neolithic (seventh Millennium) contexts in southern Corsica.

Neither the type of vase nor its cultural impact can yet be realistically defined, but it is at least clear that Sardinia has a stake in the oldest "trade" so far documented in the archaeological record of Western Mediterranean contacts and communication. Neutron activation analysis has confirmed its presence in Neolithic times of obsidian from Sardinia as far afield as southern France, the north Italian provinces of Emilia, Lombardy and Liguria - whence a characteristic, unmistakable, square-mouthed vase found its way to the type of site of the Sardinian Middle Neolithic Bonu Ighinu culture, the apocrymally named "Bat's Cave" (Sa 'tucca de su Tinolu), of which David Truemp, co-excavator with the late Don Renato Loria, provides the English translation.

In the circumstances, it is hard to remember that Margaret Guido had to begin her survey with the Copper Age because there was virtually nothing earlier. Now her and Atzke's ubiquitous Ozian culture is regarded as

Neolithic, and effectively sets the scene for what comes next, which consists in the first instance of the extensive ceramic and other material pertaining to the cultural entity implicit in the homely term '(Bell) Beaker'. Maria Luisa Ferrarese Cerutti's excellent and well-illustrated 'Campaniforme' chapter in *Ichnusa* makes it impossible ever again to pass over the splendid Sardinian manifestations of this pan-European phenomenon in the deafening silence accorded to it both by the organizers of the *Glöckenbecher Symposium* at Oberried in 1974, and by an otherwise well informed British account of Copper Age archaeology in Western Europe, R. J. Harrison's *The Beaker Folk* (1980).

It will be clear by now that Sardinia's natural resources were attractive to the outside world already in the prehistoric period. In later times, the most obvious indication that similar mechanisms were at work has resided in the patently commercial interest that brought Phoenician prospectors and colonists in significant numbers from the Levant to Sardinia in the ninth and eighth centuries, at roughly the same time as their Euboean counterparts were actively exploring the Bay of Naples and Southern Etruria. Further

Southern Etruria. Further substantial proof of analogous interest emanating from the East Mediterranean came to light in 1980, when excavation (described in an exciting appendix to *Ichnussa*) of an alien cult place inside the rugged fortress of Antigori, Sarroch, yielded fragments of pottery belonging to more than 150 Mycenaean vases of the thirteenth to the eleventh centuries; the context is redolent of peaceful co-habitation in an impressive site that dominates the sea-borne approach to the mineral-rich south-west. There too, the theme of external exploitation of Sardinian mineral resources is underlined by Frank Cross's 1972 translation of the Phoenician inscription on the Nora Stone, found in 1773. In Cross's version, the Stone commemorates a victory won over 'Sis' is neither Tarsus in Cilicia nor Carthage in Spain: as in Akkadian (Babylonian), the name 'Sis' might mean 'mine, smelting-plant, refinery' in Phoenician, and thus resemble modern Carbo-nia, not far from Nora, which was founded as a new town in 1938 to mine the coal (unique in Italian territory) of the Sulcis-Iglesiente district. And 'Pmy' is the Pygmalion of Greek tradition, the king of Tyre whose lone reign, spanning the ninth and eighth centuries, was a shining point of Phoenician glory.


The high point of Phoenician glory.<sup>1</sup> All these non- and pre-nuragic advances are obviously relevant to the interpretation of the nuragic archaeological record itself, which still accounts for the lion's share of these three books. Here the conflict between the schools of thought respectively concerned to stress local inward-looking development and the decisive effects of interference from outside is complicated by the seemingly eternal problems of nuragic studies: the continual clearing-out and re-use of the *nuraghi* and of other non-funerary sites; and multi-period burials in the collective tombs misleadingly known as *tombe di giganti* because of their size. These two customs, apparently essential to the nuragic way of life, are together responsible for a maddening lack of hard evidence for an orderly, and datable, sequence of associated features of material culture and of economic, historical, religious and social realities they represent. This essentially negative situation is rendered all the more tantalizing by the remarkably sophisticated techniques employed alike in nuragic building and in nuragic metalwork, of which the famous and distinctive bronze figurines ("bronzetti") — perhaps the single most enjoyable ancient artifact that has survived to line the pockets of clandestine operators and their pseudo-scholarly backers.

lately backslaps. — Hopes that nuragic accomplishment would not always have to be appreciated 'independently' of chronological context were raised by Giovanni Lilliu's 1955 edition of the mighty Nurag complex at Barumini into a series of dated building phases; and they are confirmed now by his masterly incorporation of the years' subsequent discovery and exegesis of himself and others into the text of *La civiltà nuragica*. His brand new scheme of nuragic chronology is presented in five very compact tables which give three phases to the Bronze

(1800–900) and two to the Iron Age (from 900 to the institution of the Roman province in 238 ac). Doubtless this too will be revised in time. But what does seem conclusively demonstrated now is the thesis that cultural changes in Sardinia cannot be registered in terms of the schemes evolved for other purposes in the Italian peninsula or in the Aegean and the Levant.

Thus, although Ferruccio Barreca begins his account of contacts between "Protosardic" and Phoenicians with a reference to early imported Phoenician *bronzeni*, it is clear that native aptitudes and native non-conformist originality contributed far more to the creation of their unmistakably nuragic counterparts – some of which actually seem, as Nancy Sandars understood long ago, to be caricatures of the frantically gesticulating Levantine visitors to Sardinian ports (or at melting points). Is this symptomatic too, as Fulvia Lo Schiavo shows, that the alleged Cypriot and even Wessex daggers in the early Ottava hoard are not imports: they are Sardinian versions of foreign types. In the case of the splendidly Cypriot-looking miniature tripod in the British Museum's hoard of Sardinian bronzes from Santa Maria in Paulis, a alimur new diagnosis by Ellen Macnamara is confirmed by physical analysis of the metal. Nor can it be said often enough that in Etruria and in the Classical world generally we have to wait until the Orientalizing or even the Archaic periods (between the seventh and fifth centuries according to *arca*) for the technical mastery displayed long before by the nuragic bronzesmiths. By the same token, Ercolo Contu discards – for good, let us hope – the supposed causal connection between the architecture of the Mycenaean *tholos* tombs and that of the *nuraghi*, which were intended to serve the more mundane (and usually defensive) needs of the living. Rightly too, Contu is scathing in his condemnation of the fashion in draughts-

period, so too in nuragic times Sardinia goes its own way, and is a force to be reckoned with in its own decidedly non-Classical right. The island is indeed in touch with the mainstream of progress in the Mediterranean, but as a partner rather than as an observer on the sidelines. That nuragic affairs have been regarded as peripheral to the past is largely the result of the geographical preferences in archaeological research that came naturally to the political super-powers of the last century. Had the British Government, for example, heeded Nelson's advice and taken possession of "the finest island in the Mediterranean" when it had the chance in 1803, it is possible that Colin Renfrew's *Emergence of Civilization* would have been better informed in 1972. But such speculation is idle: what really matters in 1984 is that, on the showing of these three excellent books, Sardinian archaeology is in the right hands and on the right course. We all have a lot to learn.

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# The stalled locomotive

Martin Jay

PERRY ANDERSON  
In *The Tracks of Historical Materialism*  
112pp. Verso. £15 (paperback, £4.95).  
0 86091 776 2

Perry Anderson might well have called his Welles lectures at the University of California, Irvine *On rather than In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*. For their major concern is the current obstacles to the progressive realization of the promise of Marxist theory. Beginning by reflecting on the predictions he made at the end of *Considerations on Western Marxism* in 1976, Anderson acknowledges that whereas many have been realized, the most crucial – "the reunification of Marxist theory and popular practice in a mass revolutionary movement" – has not. With admirable candour, directed among other targets at the Trotskyist movement with which he has been associated, Anderson sets out to provide an "internal" as well as "external" explanation for this failure.

Anderson locates the major internal or purely intellectual source of what is only the latest in a series of "crises of Marxism" in the widespread success of structuralist and post-structuralist thought emanating from Paris, the current "capital of European intellectual reaction". In a powerfully argued chapter on the dialectic of subject and structure that will be of interest to anyone, whatever his or her political inclinations, concerned with recent theoretical trends, Anderson focuses on the consequences of the French "exorbitation of language". Inflating linguistics into the master model of all social analysis, he charges, is inappropriate for a variety of reasons. The exchange of signs is an inadequate analogy for economic behaviour, and the linguistic model is incapable of grasping the initiative is absent on the deep collective level of language, existing instead only at the level of the individual.

Anderson's argument, which he develops with the notion of the "world revolution" in Cambodia, Vietnam and elsewhere, Anderson hopes to confine the crisis of Marxist theory to Latin Europe, which he

either. And, finally, the obsession with signifiers at the expense of what they signify, the turning away from the referential function of language which even Saussure had emphasized, undermines the crucial distinction between truth and falsehood, which Anderson claims is the "ineliminable premise of any rational knowledge".

In ways too complicated to detail here, Anderson then probes the transformation of the initial anti-subjectivism of structuralists like Lévi-Strauss into the hyper-subjectivism of post-structuralists like Derrida, who none the less also reject the possibility of a coherent, totalized rational subject. "The adoption of the language model as the 'key to all mythologies'", he contends, "far from clarifying or decoding the relations between structure and subject, led from a rhetorical absolutism of the first to a fragmented fetishism of the second, without ever advancing a theory of their relations." Because of this lack, these movements were highly volatile in political terms, ultimately coming down on the anti-Marxist side after the misfiring of Althusser's attempt to generate a structuralist Marxism.

Anderson explains this shift, which he sees as having most dramatically occurred in the Latin countries of Europe, in terms external to theory as well. Beginning with Western Marxism's incapacity to assimilate the sombre lessons of Soviet Communism, a failure best symbolized by the uncompleted second volume of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Anderson points to a succession of subsequent historical disillusionments whose implications were also troubling for Marxist theory. In particular, he stresses the collapse of the myth of the Chinese cultural revolution and the dampening of hopes in Eurocommunism. The latter, he claims, was especially decisive in stimulating the strong turnabout in attitudes towards Marxism in the West.

By emphasizing this second failure, in particular the failure of the "Third World" revolution, Anderson hopes to confine the crisis of Marxist theory to Latin Europe, which he

contrasts with an Anglo-American and Northern European world where a "steadier and more tough-minded historical materialism proved generally capable of withstanding political isolation or adversity". There may well be a measure of wishful thinking in this comparison, at least for America where Foucault and Derrida are far more likely to be cited these days than Lukács or Marcuse. But in so far as an alternative linguistic theory has gained popularity outside of Latin Europe, a theory which can be used to renew rather than undermine Marxism, his generalization has some merit. That theory is derived largely from the work of Jürgen Habermas, whose absence from *Considerations on Western Marxism* Anderson now explicitly regrets.

Acknowledging the tenacity of Habermas's political commitment and the remarkable scope of his theoretical enterprise, Anderson none the less faults him for an idealist over-estimation of the communicative potential in language, which curiously mirrors in reverse the French fetish of the linguistic. Whereas the latter "developed a kind of diabolism of language, Habermas has unwittingly produced an 'angelism'". As a result, Anderson concludes, he has underplayed the importance of labour and thus missed the still central role only the working class can play as the agent of radical social change.

In his final observations, Anderson briefly confronts the challenge to the traditional Marxist primacy of the proletariat posed by the recent feminist, ecological and peace movements. He acknowledges their value in reintroducing questions of the relationship between nature and history, as well as their contribution to the long neglected subject of socialist morality. But denying the ability of any of these new social movements to spark a more universal human liberation, he defends the necessity of working them together with the broader emancipatory struggle of the proletariat. "The search for a new, more effective strategy for the dislodgement of objective structures," he concludes, "inevitably, a work as wide-ranging and com-

pressed as *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* invites a number of questions. The linkage, for example, between the French "exorbitation" of language and the collapse of Eurocommunism needs to be more explicitly spelled out, especially as the prime Italian representative of the turn against Marxism, Lucio Colletti, has expressed his disillusionment by espousing a violently anti-linguistic neo-positivism that denounces Marxism for not being scientific enough. One might also wonder about the infinite creativity of *parole* and the scarcity of economic life, in the light of Georges Bataille's influential notion of a "general" rather than "restricted" economy based on *dépense* (waste or expenditure) instead of the production and exchange of scarce goods. The characterization of Habermas's naively "angelic" reversal of the French "diabolism" of language might also warrant revision, for Habermas himself explicitly repudiated this very failing in his debate with Gadamer's idealist hermeneutics. And finally, whether or not the very concept of a collective historical agent – a concept derived from the Hegelian notion of a meta-subject and abandoned by structuralist, post-structuralist and Habermas alike – can still be defended is very much in doubt. For not only have the theoretical assaults on it taken their toll; so too has the failure of history to produce such a beast, except in the dangerously distorted version of a vanguard party claiming to set in its name.

With the magisterial command of relevant literature and keen eye for crucial questions that his readers have come to expect, Anderson has produced a book that goes to the heart of the deepening crisis of the tradition which he has eloquently and vigorously defended for almost a quarter century. Any future attempt to work its way out of the quandary of contemporary Marxism will have to acknowledge the locomotive of historical materialism to proceed along its destined route. That it still may be stalled, despite these efforts, testifies to the immovability of the obstacles that the modern world presents to any theory that hopes to ride the ringing grooves of change into a better future.

have been of crucial value. Successful academics in late middle age, for the most part, they are all old enough to have experienced Nazism at first hand, yet did not come to maturity until after its defeat. Their traumatic memories as Hitler-Youth members and boy soldiers were to leave them hypersensitive to political fanaticism in all its forms. As Dieter Wellershoff says in his essay:

"Count me out" was the maxim of the survivor, who at that time in Germany shed their uniforms with the determination never to wear one again, not even an inner uniform, no collectively ordered world-view, no ideology.

It was the hope of Wellershoff and those like him that such disillusionment might lead to a political order in Germany in which the moderate virtues of humanity, generosity and self-restraint would flourish. That their hopes were to vain the events of 1977 made bitterly clear. Yet the lessons which they were forced to learn are not ones which apply to Germany alone. Wellershoff remembers his first visit to England in the 1950s:

On the trip across the Channel I listened to a radio programme commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of Britain, in which Hitler's invading air force had been destroyed. The speaker, a clergyman, said, as it were a metaphysical certitude, "God flew at our side." At one time something similar had appeared on the belt-buckles of German soldiers: *Gott mit uns*. I turned out to have been a grotesque deception.

And the conclusion he draws is surely the right one: "Even in defeat there are special opportunities for insight."

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# The vagabond in vogue

Virgil Nemoianu

PANAŢISTRATI  
Le Pèlerin du cœur  
Edited by Alexandre Talex  
259pp. Paris: Gallimard. 70fr.  
2 07 071352

On January 3, 1921, in the Parc Albert in Nice, a man was found with his throat slashed, a failed suicide. His name was PanaŢ Istrati, and he was the illegitimate offspring of a washerwoman in the fluvial part of Braila in Romania. Istrati had been a vagabond since the age of fourteen, roaming the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Europe, trying all kinds of trades and feeling the heavy hand of the police to a dozen countries. He had even written a little, but his few publications had merely attracted the patronizing encouragement of critics inclined to be generous to self-taught working-class writers. His political and union activities had been fiery and generous, but he was obviously too inconsistent, emotional and lacking in discipline to be truly useful to the leaders of the political Left.

Losted of a suicide note the wretched young man had left a long letter full of pathos and humour addressed to Romain Rolland. This was forwarded to the great pacifist writer whose *Jem Christophe* had impressed Istrati as the greatest masterpiece of modern prose. Rolland in turn was smitten by this protégé, proclaimed the young vagabond a Gorky of the Balkans and, as Istrati recovered, began to coach him for success. Within seven years Istrati had published two dozen short stories and novels, the bulk of his oeuvre, which were hailed by the critics and lapped up enthusiastically

by an audience used to the exotic melodramas of such as Loti, Paul Morand, Pierre Benoit and Joseph Kessel. His faulty French, whose grammar and idioms were copied from an uneducated Romanian, added spice and authenticity to stories that depicted a lurid, semi-rural world of violent passions, drunken crimes, misery and cloying sentimentality. In it, instinct-dominated individuals commit sadistic crimes and pay for them with terrible sufferings. The rich and powerful torture the down-trodden masses. By any serious aesthetic standards this was less than distinguished writing.

Istrati's fall from grace was equally swift. He was invited in 1928 to visit the Soviet Union and spent over a year there. Within a few short months all his anarchist instincts were roused to fever pitch. He felt intense hatred for the Leninist system although he was far from recognizing its full repressiveness. Typically, much of his first book about his Soviet experiences was devoted to a marginal case of petty revolutionary who had lost his party standing was being harassed by local housing officials. Despite its limited scope the book, coming as it did from a darling of the radical literary establishment, was one of the first major statements of "deconversion" and provoked a wave of indignation. Rolland had already closeted himself with his protégé and pleaded for days against its publication. Istrati was greeted as a traitor by a chorus of journalists in France and found it more difficult to publish thereafter; he certainly lost the critical acclaim to which he was accustomed. He was a broken man and his remaining years were a blurred and confused decline. The tuberculosis he suffered from got rapidly worse. Two more anti-Soviet books appeared under his signature but they were

written by others (one of them by Boris Souvarine, the émigré Trotskyist and one of the first "Kremlinologists"). In Romania, whither Istrati now returned, he had been treated all along with icy contempt by the critics. He gave lectures for pacifist-humanist foundations and spoke up for striking coal-miners, but few listened. From his sick-bed he joined forces with a leading defector from the Romanian Fascist movement, who soon ended up being hacked to pieces with an axe by his former comrades. Istrati died in 1935.

This pathetic career is nevertheless fascinating, not least because Istrati's writings continue to hold public attention: they were translated into most European languages, they are now available once more in their entirety in French paperback editions, half a dozen competent critical monographs have appeared in France and Romania in the past ten years or so, and intellectual journals have devoted whole issues to the discussion of Istrati's ideas and craft.

This puzzling success may be explained by the traditional French search for noble savages, for the values of a worthy innocence. If Mme de Staël's noble savages were the Germans and Chateaubriand's the Amerindians, in the 1840s and 50s the Romanians enjoyed a brief vogue in France as the Danubian principalities struggled to achieve sovereignty and to be unified. Both Edgar Quinet and Michelet were enthusiastic about the authenticity and significance of Romanian folk-culture. The Romanian political and cultural élites remained forever grateful for this interest, regarded France as their alternative fatherland and vowed to turn the newly independent country into a Belgium of the Balkans, a voluntary satellite. For most Romanian intellectuals, probably to this day, French society remained an Eden, an ideal projection where the many contradictions (rural-urban, cultural-practical, democratic-noble) of their own soci-

French interest in Romania, however, soon began to ebb, until, in Istrati, Romain Rolland and others found a perfect object for their enthusiasm: he was rebellious, rootless, naïve and impetuous, an authentic, unsophisticated intellectual secreted organically by the masses. Such enthusiasm, alas, short-lived and voracious: the poor victim is imperiously possessed, consumed and discarded, which would probably have been the fate of Istrati, even without his stubborn political integrity. (Towards the end of his life he described himself as "the man who will adhere to nothing".)

In the case of Istrati another misunderstanding was at work, well illustrated by the present anthology of recollections, fragments, lectures and reflections, most of which had been long out of print and are now reverentially reissued by one of his old friends to celebrate the centenary of his birth. These show that Istrati was not an ignorant, spontaneous writer, but rather a man of plans and deliberations, albeit plaintive and sentimental ones. In a word, Istrati is an example not of the noble savage, but rather of what Michael Oakeshott has called the "individual *maugre*". He is one of those who feel saddened and threatened by the accelerated dissolution of social bonds and values in a modernizing world and by the emergence of unattached individuals. He came from a part of the world where accelerated progress had led more than once to ferocious results and he had an unerring eye for the suffering and loss that accompanies such progress even at its best. The amount of suffering Istrati embraced and experienced, as well as his huge sympathy for those who were defeated, is truly astonishing. The "individual *maugre*" is a less than likable character – resentful and scheming, but it is only fair to let him speak for himself. Istrati did so with touching sincerity, rejecting all political masks and pretence. He thereby remains, even in defeat, oddly attractive to a wider readership than finds an at least occasional interest in

# Friends of Georgia

B. G. Hewitt

GURAM SARADZE  
Bednerebisa de Satsnoebis Saunje  
Wordop'ebid de Sakartvelo  
493pp. Tbilisi: Sub'ota Sakartvelo. 2.30 roubles.

Guram Saradze is a member of the Rustaveli Institute of Literature of the Georgian Academy of Sciences and the author of a number of monographs on Georgian literature. In the autumn of 1981 he was sent to England on a month's study-trip to work primarily in the Bodleian Library with the aim of discovering new information about the life and work of the great nineteenth-century Georgian writer and patriot, Prince Iliia Čavčavadze, in connection with a forthcoming academic edition of his writings. *Bednerebisa de Satsnoebis Saunje* is a record of Saradze's researches in Oxford and of his experiences in England generally, but also recounts the origins of Georgian studies in Britain as a result of the activities of Oliver (later Sir Oliver) Wardrop and his sister, Marjory.

Transcaucasian Georgia was finally annexed by Imperial Russia in 1801, and there followed decades of attempted Russification. All Georgian schools were closed or once replaced by Russian ones. By 1873 the Georgian language was taught only as an optional subject in the pre-high school classes of secondary schools, and around 1890 it was banished from primary schools too. It is ironic that, at a time when the language was suffering repression, Georgia should have produced some of its greatest writers – indeed, the poet and novelist Čavčavadze (1837–1907) and the lyric poet Akaki Cereteli (1840–1915) may truly be called the creators of the modern literary language. The two writers, together with the pedagogical, Iakob Gogebashvili (1840–1912), led a campaign for children to be taught in their native Georgian, while Čavčavadze spearheaded the movement to reform the literary language in order to make it more representative of the spoken tongue of the period.

In 1887, at the height of this reformist movement the diplomat Oliver Wardrop paid his first visit to Georgia, and thus began his life-long association with the land, its language and literature. His description of his journey appeared the following year, entitled *The Kingdom of Georgia: Notes of travel in the land of*

*dom of Georgia: Notes of travel in the land of* younger sister Marjory to whom he was to marry and learn the language in order to translate its literature. In 1894 he published a collection of Georgian folk-tales, while Oliver brought out a translation of Suban Saba Orbeliani's *The Book of Wisdom and Lies*. Having translated its national epic, *Sata Rustaveli*, he published it in 1895, as *The Hermit: A Legend*. In 1894 and 1896 Marjory Wardrop paid her only two visits to Georgia. Together with her brother she met and befriended the leading intellectuals of the day, and earned the nation's gratitude by promising to translate its national epic, *Sata Rustaveli*. This *The Man in the Panther-skin* (c.1200). This translation was eventually published after her death in 1911 (reprinted in 1966) and can still more than hold its own against subsequent translations.

The Wardrops' contribution to Georgian studies does not end with their notable translations. In 1910, in memory of his sister, Oliver established the Marjory Wardrop Fund for the encouragement of Georgian studies in the United Kingdom, which now supports a single scholarship for post-graduate research (among other activities). Furthermore, all the Wardrops' books, manuscripts and documents were touching on Georgia and the Caucasus were donated to the Bodleian Library, whose Wardrop Collection is today the basis of its Caucasian holdings – perhaps the finest of its kind anywhere outside Georgia itself.

Saradze's book is thus, essentially, a tribute to the noble pioneering work of a brother and sister in the establishment in this country of the study of the language, literature and culture of an exceptional and ancient Caucasian race. Regrettably, however, in a section entitled "Karvelology against Thatcher" (Georgian is "Karvelology" against Thatcher), Saradze's one of four Karvelian languages), Saradze's Georgian readers will learn that, as a result of government-imposed cut-backs the Caucasian Department at the London School of Oriental and African Studies has just been closed. Since this was the only such department in the country, one must ask what the future can now be for Caucasian studies and what place for the good-will that a small Caucasian nation has always been ready to bestow on those overseas who study their culture?

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# Autumn retrospective

Michael Rosen

JÜRGEN HABERMAS (Editor)  
*Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age"*  
Translated by Andrew Buchwalter  
381pp. MIT Press. £28.50.  
0 262 08132 6

With their covers bare of illustration, their vivid colours shedding gradually from one book to the next, the shelves devoted to the *edition suhrkamp* in West German bookshops have seemed to represent the Bundesrepublik as it

would like to be seen – clean, bright, progressive, orderly. Picking out one of the volumes inside its black cover one notes a remarkable collection of authors (the Bs: Brecht, Benjamin, Bloch (Ernst), Thomas Bernhard, Jürgen Becker – but also Baudelaire, Beckett, Bloch (Marc), Bröthes, Kenneth Burke, Baran and Sweezy, Bachrach and Beratz and many others): the élite troops of the Suhrkamp Verlag, in their smart jackets, ready to meet the educational explosion of the 1960s and 70s.

And meet it they did in a quite remarkable way. In the promotion of serious modern literature, in providing a forum for aesthetic, philosophical and social theory, and in its extensive programme of translation, it is doubtful whether any publisher has ever, anywhere, been so dominant as Suhrkamp was in those years. But was there really (as George Steiner once put it in these pages – to the great delight of the Verlag) a "Suhrkamp culture"? And, if so, what has happened to it?

On the occasion of the one thousandth volume of the *edition suhrkamp*, the distinguished *Suhrkamp-Autor*, the philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas wrote to a group of his contemporaries and colleagues loving them to take part in a collaborative project. His idea was that they should take up the theme of Karl Jaspers's *On the Spiritual Situation of the Age*, which had been the thousandth volume of a similar collection, the *Sammlung Göschen*, in 1931.

Habermas's main purpose was not, however, to mark a milestone in publishing history – or even the thirtieth anniversary in 1979 of the founding of the Bundesrepublik, which would coincide with the book's publication. The need that he and his colleagues felt for some kind of collective stock-taking relates to the aftermath of the "German Autumn" of 1977. The events of that year – the attempt to

bargain for the release of gaoled members of the Baader-Meinhof group by the hijacking of a Lufthansa jet to Mogadishu; the long drawn-out kidnapping of the industrialist Hans-Martin Schleyer; the deaths in Stammheim prison of Andreas Bader, Gudrun Enslin, and Jan-Carl Raaspe; Schleyer's subsequent murder by the terrorists – produced a political reaction so intense and enraged that it seemed entirely possible that it would sweep away with it whatever was rational or critical in West German public life. Now, if ever, was the time for the "Suhrkamp culture" to show how secure were its roots.

The threats came from both directions. On one side, public hostility and anger against the terrorists were being channelled on to the far more visible target of the democratic Left who had (it was said) prepared the ground for terrorism. Yet each new authoritarian measure on the part of the state (wholly pointless, it would turn out, in the actual pursuit of the terrorists) seemed only to reinforce the gnostic claim on which the Baader-Meinhof group was premised: the idea that terrorism would "tear the mask" from the system and reveal its "latent fascism".

Something of the hysterical and harrowing atmosphere of those months comes across in the film *Germany in Autumn*, made shortly afterwards by a group of leading German directors. It was a time when nothing dreadful seemed impossible. Several of the contributions to *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age"* appear to have been written by men in a state of shock, hardly able to accept the reality of the destructive emotions around them. Yet, whatever its shortcomings as political analysis, this book is a document of great significance placed in its context by Andrew Buchwalter's admirable introduction (and notes). It gives voice to a generation of German intellectuals whose experiences might

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446pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0571 132901

Paul Joubert, the expatriate Afrikaner at the centre of *The Wall of the Plague*, is "a middle-aged writer with a reputation greater than [his] achievement". Aunt Catherine's legacy (a flat in Paris, "the little villa in Villefranche") has liberated him from the breast-beating demands of liberal South African fiction. "To be a writer in a place like that", he complains, "means that one is dragged into so many other things that in the end you have no time left for the one thing you set out to do, writing. . . I don't want to have a role forced on me, dammit. I'm not a social reformer or a revolutionary. I just want to be a writer." The sentiments and circumstances are familiar to Brink himself: he was a post-graduate student at the Sorbonne and, in 1967, returned to Paris with the intention of settling there permanently. But the *événements* of 1968 galvanized his political spirit and he returned to South Africa "in order to accept full responsibility for whatever I wrote, believing that, in a closed society, the writer has a specific social and moral role to fill".

Joubert's artistic integrity has long been eroded by the easy cash and manageable fame of scriptwriting for the cinema. He is what an expatriate Brink would have become, a writer detached from his creative mainspring. His literary and personal redemption rests on his *Major Work in Progress* — a novel which indulges those two "most abiding influences" which Brink, elsewhere, has acknowledged as his: Albert Camus and "the study of his-

procures a film offer for the unwritten book and dispatches his Cape Coloured "fiancée", Andrea Malgas, and an on-the-run Xhosa activist, Mandla Mqayisa, to Provence in search of plague locations. Their journey between Carcassonne and the Murs of the title (interspersed with some powerful cameos from their South African childhoods and some less powerful resurrections of previous visits to Provence) provides the narrative structure, upon which Brink's themes perch as heavily and unsteadily as coots on lily pads.

"Do you realize that . . . there are still only five or six areas in the world from which the Plague regularly starts all over again", asks Joubert, immersed (as Brink has so frequently immersed himself) in the indulgence of museums, manuscripts and textbooks, "and that one of them is in South Africa?" Joubert's novel (film), then, is to be another cosy joust with apartheid, a "clever" literary illustration (akin to Brink's own historical reconstructions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Afrikanerdom. *An Instant in the Wind* and *A Chain of Voices*) in which actuality provides the dough for the imagination. The plague can count as racism, but also as the African hordes at the gates of the Boer. The "wall" in Provence is the laager of covered wagons, but is also that "little fortress of beautiful words" which is the alternative to committed fiction. It is a catch-all, sprawling metaphor. Even the simplest observation about the plague will elicit some quasi-political analogical reverberation.

Joubert unearths, for example, the unexceptional description by an eighteenth-century doctor of "the pestilence" which neatly encapsulates the dilemma of the white South African liberal, torn between emigration and direct involvement in an armed campaign: it is "a cruel malady which cannot be healed by

settle for the fruits and freedoms of Paris or to "plunge into romantic action" — like Brink's one-time Parisian flat-mate, Breyten Breytenbach — by returning home. The implicit irony is that immersion in plague studies works on Andrea and Joubert. Metaphor is potent, kindling in both of them a recommitment to personal and political action. But André Brink's conclusion appears to dismiss as inadequate all fictions which, like "The Black Death", tussle with apartheid artfully and obliquely.

*The Wall of the Plague* is a courageous self-assessment by a dissatisfied writer (Joubert/Brink) ill at ease with the literary, analytical aloofness of the artist and the émigré. Yet Brink's prose style — which has proved least defective in the formal historical novels that he now so openly discredits — is here undisciplined and tuneless.

The asthmatic sentence. (A Brink hallmark.) Perhaps an affectation, readily cured. Perhaps a vestige of Brink's tortuous working method. (First draft in the "more over, more externalized, more extroverted Afrikaans", second draft in understated English, plus a final translation back into Afrikaans.) Is disruptive.

Much of the dialogue (between brooding sensitives whose capacities for laughter, flippancy and liveliness have been overwhelmed

by self-obsession) is neglectfully cod, thinly motivated and rawly expressed. Any sexual contact (from "He was caressing my low-hair now" to "The brief slaking of the interminable thirst") is ineptly sub-Laurentian, and provides the novel with its only (inadvertent) moments of humour. Brink's "insights" into human sexuality are farcically solemn: Joubert makes love to Andrea Malgas, for example, "with these same hands [which] only a few hours ago . . . handled the skulls of people who died from Plague". "The curious thing about it, however", comments Brink, "is that . . . she is not repulsed by it: in the very terror she discovers an abandonment and a lust more heroic than she has ever known before."

Despite the clumsiness of its execution, *The Wall of the Plague* remains an interesting and pivotal work, which signals a re-throwing of Brink's fiction. He has been at his best when working with rigid literary constraints and themes which proceed surreptitiously. He would have excelled as the author of Joubert's "The Black Death"; with *The Wall of the Plague*, however, he has declared his impotence with the duet of history and literature and dismissed his earlier stated conviction that "literature should never descend to the level of politics". His reappraisal is a muddle, but it is done with sincerity and intelligence.

## Casualties at odds

Patricia Craig

JENNIFER JOHNSTON  
The Railway Station Man  
187pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.  
0241 113741

Johnston specializes in intriguing friendships between unlike people — we remember the boy Joe Logan and the young school-mistress of *Shadows on Our Skin*, and Nancy Gullus and her fugitive freedom fighter in *The 6th Jest*. *The Railway Station Man* continues another pair engagingly at odds with conventional social practices, and somewhat reluctantly attached to one another: Helen, the central character, and a rich Englishman eccentrically committed to the restoration of disused railway stations. Roger Hawthorne, one-armed and one-eyed, is a survivor of Amiens in the last war, and unpredictable in his social manner: abrupt and forthcoming by turns. The author is adept at uncov'ring the unexpected affinity which exists between her leading characters, and at contriving a theme out of the way it is expressed.

*The Railway Station Man* tells a sombre story, dealing as it does with the casualties of various conflicts, and with a palatizing and profitless piece of renovation. The station of the title doesn't remain for long in its newly intact condition. The emphasis, though, is on the resilience of the spirit, and the epics of the novel, by and large, are set out with a certain amount of inoffensive whimsicality. Jennifer Johnston's fiction steers well clear of explanation ("Explanations are so tedious for the writer as well as the reader", she says in this work: it's a statement of policy), analysis, authorial comment, political theorizing, dogmatism of any sort, and anything else that might add undue weight to her miniature dramas. Her new novel is flawed but still buoyant.

FRANK PARRISH  
Face at the Window  
160pp. Constable. £6.50.  
009 4655006

An alcoholic old woman has been murdered and £5,000 in notes stolen. The chief suspects are Dan Mallett, that former bank manager turned, odd-job man and poacher, and Natasha, a pretty little actress whom Dan's mother sees as just the person to reform her son and drag him back to suburbia. This is Frank Parrish's fifth Dan Mallett novel; neatly turned, highly amusing and set in a genuinely earthy slice of countryside.

## The Fire-Gap

A poem with two tails by TONY HARRISON

The fire-patrol plane's tail fins flash.  
I see it suddenly swoop low,  
or maybe it's scouting out the hash  
some 'crackers' round here grow.  
There's nothing on our land to hide,  
no marijuana here,  
I think the patrol's quite satisfied  
the fire-gap's bulldozed clear.  
I'm not concerned what's in the air  
but what's beneath my feet.  
This fire-gap I walk on's where  
the snake and I will meet.  
Where we live is much the same  
as other land in the US,  
half kept cultivated, tame,  
and half left wilderness,  
and living on this fire-gap  
between wilderness and tilled  
is the snake my neighbours want to trap;  
they want 'the motherfucker' killed.  
One man I know round here who's mean  
would blast the hole with dynamite  
or flood the lair with gasoline  
and maybe set the woods alight.  
Against all truculent advice  
I've let the rattler stay,  
and go each day with my flask of ice  
to my writing shed this way.  
I think the land's quite big enough  
to contain both him and me  
as long as the odd, discarded slough  
is all of the snake I see.  
But I'm aware that one day on this track  
there'll be when I'm least alert

poised to do me mortal hurt,  
or I might find its shrugged-off shed —  
'clothes on the beach', 'gone missing',  
and just when I supposed him dead  
be's right behind me, hissing.  
Although I know I risk my neck  
each time I pass I stare  
into the gopher hole to check  
for signs the rattler's there.  
I see the gopher's pile of dirt  
with like rope-marks dragged through  
and I'm at once on the alert  
for the killer of the two.  
Is it perverse of me to start  
each morning as I pass the hole  
with a sudden pounding of my heart,  
my fear out of control,  
my Adam's apple in a vice,  
so scared that I mistake  
the rattle of my thermos ice  
for the angry rattlesnake?  
I've started when a pine twig broke  
or found I'd only been afraid  
of some broken branch of dead live-oak  
zig-zagged with sun and shade.  
But if some barley starts to sway  
against the movement of the breeze  
and most blades lean the other way  
that's when you'd better freeze.  
If you've dragged a garden hose  
through grass that's one foot tall  
that's the way the rattler goes  
if you catch a glimpse at all.  
I killed snakes once, about a score  
in Africa and in Brazil  
yet they filled me with such awe  
it seemed grossa sacrilege to kill.  
Once with machete and domestic broom  
I duelled with a hooded snake  
with frightened children in the room  
and all our lives at stake.  
The snake and I awayed to and fro.

I swung the broom. Her thick hood spread.  
I jabbed the broom. She rode the blow  
and I hacked off her hooded head.  
Then I lopped this 'laithly worm'  
and sliced the creature into nine  
reptilian lengths that I saw squirm  
as if still one connected spine.  
The gaps between the bits I'd lopped  
seemed supple snake though made of air  
so that I wondered where life stopped  
and if death started, where?  
Since that time I've never killed  
any snake that's come my way  
between the wild land and the tilled  
where I walk every day  
towards my woodland writing shed,  
my heart mysteriously stirred  
if I get a glimpse of tail or head  
or think its rattle's what I heard  
when it's only a cicada's chirr  
that grates on my cocked ear  
not the hidden it/him/her  
it so scares me to hear.  
I've tried at last to come to terms  
and deal only through my craft  
with this laithiest of laithly worms  
with poison fore, grim music aft  
that makes my heart jam up my throat  
and fills me with fear and wonder  
as at the sound made when *Der Tod*  
(in Strasbourg) schlägt die Stunde.  
The sainted heroes of the Church  
beheaded serpents who stood for

Now I want you on my land alive  
and I don't want to fight.  
Smitten by Jehovah's curses:  
*On thy belly thou must go!*  
I don't think Light is what you're versus  
though the Bible tells me so.  
I've seen you basking in the sun.  
I've seen you entering the earth.  
Darkness and Light to you are one.  
You link together death and birth.  
The Bible has another fable  
that almost puts us on a par,  
how God smote low ambitious Babel  
for trying to reach too far.  
From being once your mortal foe  
and wanting all your kind to die,  
because the Bible told me so,  
I now almost identify.  
So, snake, old rhyming slang's  
equivalent for looking glass,  
when I walk here draw back your fangs  
and let your unlikely ally pass.  
I'm walking to my shed to write  
and work out bow they're linked  
what's called the Darkneass and the Light  
before we all become extinct.  
Laithly, maybe, but Earth-lover,  
unmolested, let me go,  
so my struggles might discover  
what you already know.  
As the low-flying fire-patrol  
makes the slash and live-oaks sway  
I go past the deep-dug gopher hole  
where I hope my snake will atay  
and stay forever if it likes.  
I swear no-one on this land will kill  
the rattlesnake unless it strikes,  
then, I give my word, I will.  
This fire-gap we trim with care  
and mow short twice a year

General Editor: A.N. Jeffares

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